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the Perfectionist's
Guide to
Fantastic Video

No. 96

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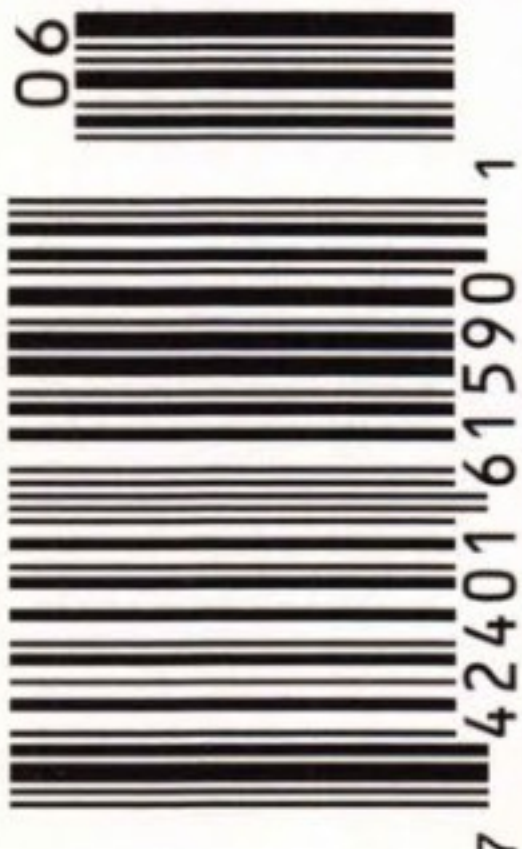


REPTILICUS

Leslie Cheung Tribute
BLUE SUNSHINE! CAPTAIN SCARLET!

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Video Watchdog®

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Guide to
Fantastic Video

No. 96 / JUN 2003

"We are only puppets; our strings
are being pulled by unknown forces."

—Georg Büchner,
DANTON'S DEATH, Act II (1835)

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KENNEL

ANTHONY AMBROGIO writes about horror movies with twist and downbeat endings in the new issue of MIDNIGHT MARQUEE (#67-68).

NICOLAS BARBANO is a writer/producer, based in Copenhagen, Denmark, who works in collaboration with Zentropa. His current project, **ALL ABOUT ANNA**, will be followed by a vampire musical scripted by Kim Newman.

STEPHEN R. BISSETTE is the resident Thing (moderator) of "The Swamp" (<http://www.fanboy.info/yabbse/index.php?board=13>), a comics and film discussion board.

JOHN CHARLES' HONG KONG DIGITAL (www.dighkmovies.com) routinely covers eclectic Asian DVD fare like **SEX MEDUSA** and **ALIEN WIFE**.

BILL COOKE's course on the history of horror films is being offered for its third semester in a row at the University of South Carolina.

SHANE M. DALLMANN's father William C. Dallmann is the author of 2 KILL OR NOT TO KILL, a

pair of "Christopher Raven" detective thrillers from Trafford Publishing (1-888-232-4444; www.trafford.com/robots/01-0490.html)

JOE DANTE tells us that his new 3-D movie **THE HAUNTED LIGHTHOUSE** is premiering at Sea World in May.

TIM LUCAS is the author of a new monthly column, "DVD Export USA," which debuts in this month's issue of SIGHT AND SOUND.

KIM NEWMAN toured the locations of **REPTILICUS** when in Denmark last year, having script meetings with Zentropa. He also saw a mural in the Zentropa studios depicting Lars von Trier as Reptilicus itself!

RICHARD HARLAND SMITH is writing a chapter about the films of Juan Lopez Moctezuma (**ALUCARDA**) for a forthcoming book on Mexican horror to be published by Luminary Press.

DOUGLAS E. WINTER is almost finished with his new novel. He owns every issue of the **REPTILICUS** and **REPTISAURUS** comic books.

VW THANKS:

A&E Home Video (Suzanne Dobson), Anchor Bay Entertainment (Perry Martin, Maral Kaloustian/Sue Procko PR), Artisan Entertainment, Juanita Bowman, Columbia TriStar Home Video (Kavita Smith), Cult Epics/CAV Distributing Corporation (Fred Eggink), Dark Star Records, Kip Doto, Image Entertainment (Spencer Savage, Nathaniel Thompson), Jeff Lieberman, Ib J. Melchior, MGM Home Entertainment (Steve Wegner), Paramount Home Video, Percepto Records (Taylor White), Something Weird Video (Mike Vraney, Lisa Petrucci), Synapse Films (Don May Jr., Jerry Chandler), Tai Seng Entertainment (Frank Djeng), Bob Villard, Warner Home Video (Karen Penhale/Carl Samrock PR), Birthe Wilke, Bret Wood and also our contributors, subscribers, correspondents, distributors—in fact, everyone who knows that life is entrancing, when we're romancing, dancing in Tivoli!

PHOTO CREDITS:

A&E Home Video (36-42, 78), Anchor Bay Entertainment (55, 71, 72), Artisan Entertainment (17), Nicolas Barbano Collection (26-28, 30-35), Brentwood Communications (4-9), Columbia TriStar Home Video (14), Cult Epics (46, 79), Kip Doto (29), Image Entertainment (44, 56, 59, 63-67), Mega Star Video Distribution (10), Paramount Home Video (inside, 69), Reynolds and Hearn (76), Something Weird Video (18, 48, 60, 61), Synapse Films (50-51), Tai Seng Entertainment (13, 16), Bob Villard Collection (21, 23), Warner Home Video (25). **ARTWORK:** Charlie Largent (cover), Pete Fitzgerald (20). **LOGO & COVER FORMAT:** Radomir Perica (International Design Studio, Bethesda MD).

This issue is dedicated to REPTILICUS' Number 1 fans: Christopher Sven Dietrich and Kip Doto.

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THE WATCHDOG BARKS



REVIEWING BLUE SUNSHINE for this issue got me thinking about great main title sequences—one of the most

inviting, yet often overlooked, aspects of the motion picture experience. Some artists, like Saul Bass and Maurice Binder, have been credited with elevating the usual “scroll through the woods” to an art form, but they are by no means the only ones to have used this obligatory space to make an artistic statement. The horror and cult genres have been unusually open to this sort of graphic experimentation, so I thought I would use this column to draw attention to some of the better examples of this often anonymous craft.

For sheer anarchistic bravado, you can’t do better than the main titles of Karl Freund’s **MAD LOVE** (1935, previously released on MGM VHS and LD): the credits are projected onto a frosted windowpane and then, once the director’s name has appeared, a fist rears up in the foreground and punches through the glass! After this, you know you’re in for a good ride and the movie lives up to its promise. Freund’s earlier **THE MUMMY** (1932, Universal) is also commendable for showing some early innovation in this field, with its miniature Sphinx, which turns to reveal a side panel etched with the film’s ancient-looking title.

Equally brilliant at setting the right mood are the titles for Universal’s **FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLF MAN** (1942, with its smoking laboratory accessories) and, especially, **SON OF DRACULA** (1943), with Alucard’s white-gloved hands appearing to wipe away the dust and cobwebs covering the still-controversial title.

Robert Aldrich must have been deliberately making a bid for greatness when he allowed the main titles of **KISS ME DEADLY** (1955, MGM Home Entertainment) to apocalyptically scroll in reverse over the fetching, almost musical accompaniment of Cloris Leachman’s sobbing. This is the movie that should have ended with Godard’s famous words: “The End. End of Cinema.”

One of the most effective, yet mystifying examples is the main title sequence of Terence Fisher’s **HORROR OF DRACULA** (1958, Warner Home Video)—not the titles themselves, but the

coda, which cuts to the resting place of Dracula himself and slowly dollies toward the name engraved on his catafalque, which is suddenly and inexplicably splattered with blood. Is this one of the horror cinema’s earliest examples of staging something purely for effect? Having never seen a copy of the film that carries its original title of **DRACULA**, I’ve always wondered if this is where that title originally appeared, following the actor and crew credits. One thing is certain, though: without this meaningless shot, we would not feel the warnful chill that makes the hair bristle on the back of our necks when Jonathan Harker crosses the bridge to the castle, and pauses to look down the stairs leading to the repository of a threat we feel we know, but have not yet seen.

It sounds decadent, but I also love the creeping, silhouetted semi-simian, the death clinch, and the splash of black blood on the paper screen which opens that underrated saga of midlife crisis, **THE MANSTER** (1962, Retromedia Entertainment), and the vertiginous, witchy, spook show intro of José Mojica Marin’s **AT MIDNIGHT I WILL TAKE YOUR SOUL** (1964, Fantoma). I’m also fond of the *tableaux vivants* that herald the first reel of **BLOOD AND BLACK LACE** (1964, VCI Entertainment), as well as the Filmmation Associates montage that was created for the film’s American release through Woolner Brothers. And when I first saw **COUNT DRACULA’S GREAT LOVE** (1972, MPI VHS, OOP) and its title sequence—a loop of a man, hatcheted in the face, tumbling down the same flight of stairs, each time a little slower—I knew that I was in the presence of a film with an uncanny sense of cinema.

Have you ever seen the German Edgar Wallace krimi **Der Hund von Blackwood Castle** (“The Hound of Blackwood Castle,” 1967)? It’s available on an import German DVD from Kinowelt; no English subs, unfortunately, but the main titles may be the most psychedelic of all time—they wobble and collide in lysergic colors over the image of a man having his throat torn out by a dog—and the Peter Thomas musical accompaniment is that hilarious cue with the vocalist scat-singing, in English, about how cold he is.

Anyway, I’m out of space. Those are some of my favorites. What are some of yours?

••••• **Tim Lucas**

WATCHDOG NEWS

IT CAME FROM
BRENTWOOD

A Look at Those Budget DVDS

By Tim Lucas

TALES OF TERROR (10 MOVIES)

1965-80, Brentwood
Home Video,
DD-2.0, \$19.99, DVD-0

Top: Elisha Cook, Jr. in
MESSIAH OF EVIL, one of 10
PD titles included in Brentwood's
TALES OF TERROR box set.

Background: The secret in the
cellar from *DIE SISTER DIE*.

As the wisdom goes, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is—but Brentwood Communications has caught the attention of the cult video community by offering some DVD box sets at an unbelievable budget price: 10 films on five two-sided discs, priced at just under \$20. Better yet, many video chainstores such

as Best Buy habitually half-price these collections at only \$9.95. While the transfers inside could hardly be called definitive (or even properly authorized), it is hard to deny their temptation value, since they can be had for less than the cost of a single DVD release. Even if half the material looks shoddy, wouldn't

these sets still be worth the investment?

The first disc in Brentwood's **TALES OF TERROR** set pairs Dario Argento's **DEEP RED—THE HATCHET MURDERS** (1975, 100m 29s) and **CHRISTMAS EVIL** (1980, 94m 58s)—an unlikely match, but the pre-credits sequence of **DEEP RED** has a Christmas setting. The on-screen title is simply **DEEP RED**, of course, and the pre-credits, main titles and end credits are all squeezed from their original anamorphic ratio (the end credits show David Hemmings in motion behind the scrolling titles, not in freeze-frame). The picture is soft and standard (cropped) format, with a poppy, crackly soundtrack that frequently distorts on the high end—not worth 1/8th of Anchor Bay's superb 16:9 rendering. Where did Brentwood get their master? Heavy, rolling, horizontal videotape scarring is occasionally evident, suggesting that they simply used an ex-rental copy of the old Thorn-EMI/HBO tape (which bore the **HATCHET MURDERS** subtitle).

Produced under the title **YOU'D BETTER WATCH OUT!**, **CHRISTMAS EVIL** stars Brandon Maggart (his face may be familiar to you from 1970s TV commercials; he's also the father of singer/songwriter Fiona Apple), and there are some familiar faces in its supporting cast, including **HOME IMPROVEMENT**'s Patricia Richardson and **AS THE WORLD TURNS**' Colleen Zenk. Another standard frame transfer, but this one looks and sounds fairly good—mostly because it's hard to imagine the original, low-budget production looking much better. Certainly not interneg quality, but satisfactory. A presumably licensed

DVD version is available from Troma.

Disc 2 offers **WEB OF THE SPIDER** (1968/71, 89m 31s) and **CIRCUS OF FEAR** (1965, 87m 3s). **WEB OF THE SPIDER** is the 1971 US edition of Antonio Margheriti's 1968 film *Nella stretta mordo del ragno* ("In the Web of the Spider"), a color remake of his earlier B&W feature **CASTLE OF BLOOD** [*Danza macabra*, 1964], starring Anthony Franciosa, Michèle Mercier and Klaus Kinski. This is a much-abbreviated, re-edited version that was supervised by NYC-based "film doctor" Fima Noveck (the man responsible for the **BLOOD COUPLE** recut of Bill Gunn's **GANJA & HESS**), and it actually moves more slowly than the longer version. Cropped to standard dimensions from the original wide-screen framing, this transfer looks like a decent, softish 16mm presentation with dull color—no more, no less. The soundtrack has some hiss. The menu screen features a Klaus Kinski bio, along with the usual "Play" and "Chapters" options, which is a few paragraphs long and scrolls over a widescreen freeze-frame from Jess Franco's **JACK THE RIPPER** to a pulsing techno-rock accompaniment.

Also featuring Kinski is **CIRCUS OF FEAR**, a Harry Alan Towers "semi-krimi," shot at London's Bray Studios with a cast including Christopher Lee, Leo Genn, Suzy Kendall, Margaret Lee, Victor Maddern and many familiar faces from the West German Edgar Wallace films, including Kinski, Heinz Drache and Eddi Arent. Standard-frame and culled from an aged 16mm source, this one unreels very much like a movie watched on an old local TV

broadcast. Originally issued in the US as a condensed B&W feature, this is the uncut version in color, which was the edition released to US TV. Blue Underground will be issuing **CIRCUS OF FEAR** later this year in a version that will undoubtedly surpass what we get here.

Disc 3 ups the ante (and the anti) with an uncut, letterboxed presentation of Ruggero Deodato's **HOUSE ON THE EDGE OF THE PARK** (1980, 87m 40s). The most attractive presentation in the set, this 1.78:1 transfer—which bears the Italian title *La casa sperduta nel parco* and sports fine picture quality and English-dubbed audio—was obviously lifted from the Dutch EC Entertainment DVD. This is the sort of intercorporate misbehavior that is not expected from labels sold in stores like Best Buy. With a superior, authorized edition of this title available (with extras) from Shriek Show/Media Blasters, the inclusion of this blatant bootleg leaves a bad taste.

Disc 3's companion feature is Willard Huyck's fascinatingly off-kilter **MESSIAH OF EVIL** (1975, 89m 30s), in a version indistinguishable from the title's release on the budget-priced Diamond DVD (which paired it with **THE DEVIL'S NIGHTMARE**, seemingly ripped from Image Entertainment's authorized release). Cropped to standard frame from its original 2.35:1 ratio, the image here looks slightly squeezed, but not enough to make widescreen viewing in "Full" or "Wide Zoom" mode very pleasurable. It's lacking its original panoramic impact and bold **SUSPIRIA**-like color, but doesn't look any better or worse than any other version that's turned up on video thus

far. Still, this is an important film that is nice to own in a digital format, even in compromised form, until the right one comes along. Soon, we hope.

Disc 4 offers **DIE SISTER DIE** (1972, 84m 14s) and Mel Welles' **LADY FRANKENSTEIN** (1971, 83m 19s). Filmed as **THE COMPANION**, **DIE SISTER DIE** is a tame but interesting suspenser, starring Antoinette Bower as a woman hired to care for an aging woman (**THE BODY SNATCHER**'s Edith Atwater), whose brother (Jack Ging) hopes to solicit Bower's help in arranging her death. **CAT PEOPLE**'s Kent Taylor also stars. Producer/director Randall Hood lives up to the Bavarian echoes of the title with some liquidy, **HATCHET FOR THE HONEYMOON**-like camera distortions and a body-in-the-basement payoff that anticipates **SHOCK**. Somewhat let down by a dated Movie of the Week look, it's not a bad little picture and very much the sort of horror movie that wives and girlfriends tend to like. Standard frame, but the whole image is undoubtedly here and looks fairly good until the end titles, which look slightly out of register; it crops well when viewed in "Zoom" mode. The audio is sometimes distractingly crackly.

The main titles of **LADY FRANKENSTEIN** are windowboxed at 1.59:1, after which it adjusts to a cropped standard ratio. The image is a little pale, with one or two odd fluctuations of color (see Rosalba Neri's "wrist-biting" moment at 1:02:20-24), but decent. Best of all, the picture hasn't been matted to produce a *faux* letterboxed look, as on the DVD Drive-In disc [reviewed VW 78:22-33], making this a much preferable, if

still imperfect, presentation. There are no end titles; the movie just cuts abruptly to black and reverts to Menu.

The final disc in the set contains the Paul Naschy favorite **THE WEREWOLF VS. THE VAMPIRE WOMAN** (1970, 81m 57s) and the Claudia Jennings pic **SISTERS OF DEATH** (1978, 87m 6s). **WEREWOLF** is the abbreviated US theatrical release version of *La noche de Walpurgis* ("Walpurgis Night"), the Paul Naschy film which Anchor Bay Entertainment released on DVD last year in a definitive 16:9 edition titled **WEREWOLF SHADOW** [VW 92:65]. Get the ABE disc instead. This version is only for those curious to see what the US distributor did to it. The audio and video here are not at all of reference quality; the picture is dark with haloed edges and the sound is boxy and occasionally shrill, prone to breaking up on the high end, thus making even the dialogue unpleasant to listen to.

In the tedious **SISTERS OF DEATH**, Arthur Franz (**MONSTER ON THE CAMPUS**) plays the father of a girl killed during a sorority initiation game who, seven years later, invites the surviving members to his desert home for revenge. Shot almost entirely in long and medium shots, this is a standard framed film that was clearly intended to be shown with a soft matte, and it enlarges pretty well on a wide-screen set. Unlikely to receive a higher profile DVD release, this disc presentation is at least stable, which is something that could not be said for its initial VHS releases, back in the 1980s, on the United and VCI labels. See VW 60:23 for Richard Harland

Smith's review of the most recent VCI tape edition.

The discs are authored by Media Galleries, Inc. and feature static menu screens accompanied by uncredited contemporary music recorded in stereo surround. Brentwood also sells a two-disc, four-movie box set called **ROOTS OF EVIL**, which collects the same transfers of **DEEP RED**, **THE HOUSE ON THE EDGE OF THE PARK**, **CHRISTMAS EVIL** and **MESSIAH OF EVIL** for \$9.98. It's available in some outlets for as little as \$7.99.

Also on the market from Brentwood are two other 10 film/5 disc horror sets: **VAULT OF HORROR** (which contains **SCREAM OF THE WOLF**, **MOON OF THE WOLF**, Earl Owensby's **WOLF-MAN**, **SNOWBEAST**, **DON'T LOOK IN THE BASEMENT**, **SILENT NIGHT**, **BLOODY NIGHT**, Jess Franco's **JACK THE RIPPER** (letterboxed, unrestored), **THE SATANIC RITES OF DRACULA** (letterboxed), **HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL**, and **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD**) and **FRIGHT NIGHT** (with **KILL, BABY... KILL!**, **THE DEVIL'S NIGHTMARE** [letterboxed], **GOD TOLD ME TO**, **GOOD AGAINST EVIL**, **PIECES**, **KISS ME KILL ME** [aka **BABA YAGA**], **SATAN'S SCHOOL FOR GIRLS**, **THE NIGHT EVELYN CAME OUT OF THE GRAVE** [cut US version], **CATHY'S CURSE** and **THE GHOST**).

Although it's unlikely that anyone purchasing these sets will consider their contents definitive, they do pose a subtle, implicit danger. In flaunting the public domain status of their contents (or at least of certain versions of their contents), these Brentwood boxes may discourage other companies from acquiring authorized,

negative elements of these titles and issuing truly definitive, restored editions of them. In the case of certain titles, like **KILL, BABY... KILL!**, **MESSIAH OF EVIL** and **THE GHOST**, this would be a grievous loss. While one must admit that, while they are worth the meager asking price as a temporary measure, no serious horror buff should mistake these for anything but what they are: a pacifier to sate us until the real deal comes along.

FIVE BLOODY GRAVES

aka **GUN RIDERS**

1970, Brentwood Home Video, DD-2.0/MA/+, \$4.99, 80m 54s, DVD-0

By John Charles

This Al Adamson picture was usually promoted (as it is here) with a title and campaign suggesting horror elements that are pretty much non-existent. It is really just a plodding, poorly produced Western about a lone gunslinger (Robert Dix) out to avenge the murder of his wife at the hands of a psychopathic Indian (John "Bud" Cardos, who plays two roles). The supporting cast includes Scott Brady, John Carradine, Jim Davis, and Paula Raymond; their presence and Vilmos Zsigmond's expert lensing of some remarkable Utah locations are the only items in the plus column here.

Though properly licensed from Independent-International, Brentwood's master is every bit as terrible as Troma's DVD of **BLOOD OF GHASTLY HORROR** [reviewed VW 75:50]. The Techniscope frame is cropped to dead center full-screen, seriously impairing Zsigmond's compositions and



Preacher John Carradine totes around more than just the Good Book in FIVE BLOODY GRAVES.

resulting in some uncomfortably enormous close-ups. Colors are reasonably well-defined, but the image is quite soft and grainy, and the obviously dated master should have been retired ages ago, not dumped onto a new media. Producer Sam Sherman provides an audio commentary running just under 53m, which is supplemented by recorded comments from Dix. The talk is informative and ultimately more worthwhile than sitting through the movie (which runs 9m shorter than the time promised on the cover). A trailer (cropboxed at 1.65:1 but with even worse picture quality than the feature) and "photo gallery" (nothing but video captures) are also included but, unlike the other Brentwood titles we have seen, there is no time coding.

THE JACKALS

1967, Brentwood Home Video, DD-2.0/+, \$4.99, 92m 56s, DVD-0

By John Charles

We are happy to watch any movie starring Vincent Price, and this South African remake of William Wellman's **YELLOW SKY** (1948) is one of the harder titles in his filmography to locate. Price plays a crazy old prospector living deep in the Transvaal with his pretty granddaughter (Diana Ivarson). A group of bank robbers stray into Price's territory and plan on leaving with the old man's substantial cache of gold. However, several of the men become attracted to the girl and dissension soon follows. Price has a field day devouring the scenery in the sort of part usually played by Gabby Hayes or Walter Brennan ("Whew, that's

a hot sun—almost enough to tempt a man to drink *water!*") and that, coupled with the novelty of watching an African Western, partially helps to compensate for weak scripting and Ivarson's unconvincing performance. Originally released by 20th Century Fox, the picture was directed by **LOVE ME TENDER** helmsman Robert D. Webb.

Most reference sources (and the keepcase) promise a running time of 105m—12m longer than what we actually get. However, if any material is indeed missing, it is not obvious. The standard framed presentation opens with the identification "Rawhide Video," a label apparently run by American Home Treasures, a competing public domain company, which offers **THE JACKALS** on

tape! On top of that, Brentwood has even reproduced the front of Rawhide's video box! One look at the DVD reveals that it has clearly been sourced from VHS, as a tracking line runs across the middle of screen for the entire movie. This is unfortunate, as the presentation is above average for these budget releases. Colors are slightly faded and the print suffers from light speckling, but the image is generally fine; the music warbles on occasion, but the audio is otherwise adequate. None of the extras are related to the movie; the only one worth mentioning is a terrific Max Fleischer cartoon, "The Cobweb Hotel" (1936; 7m 50s), the quality of which is reasonable, though video still frames have been utilized to hide any reference to

original distributor, Paramount. Only six chapters are provided and the single layer disc has an inexplicable pause at 1:14:57.

THE WILD RIDE

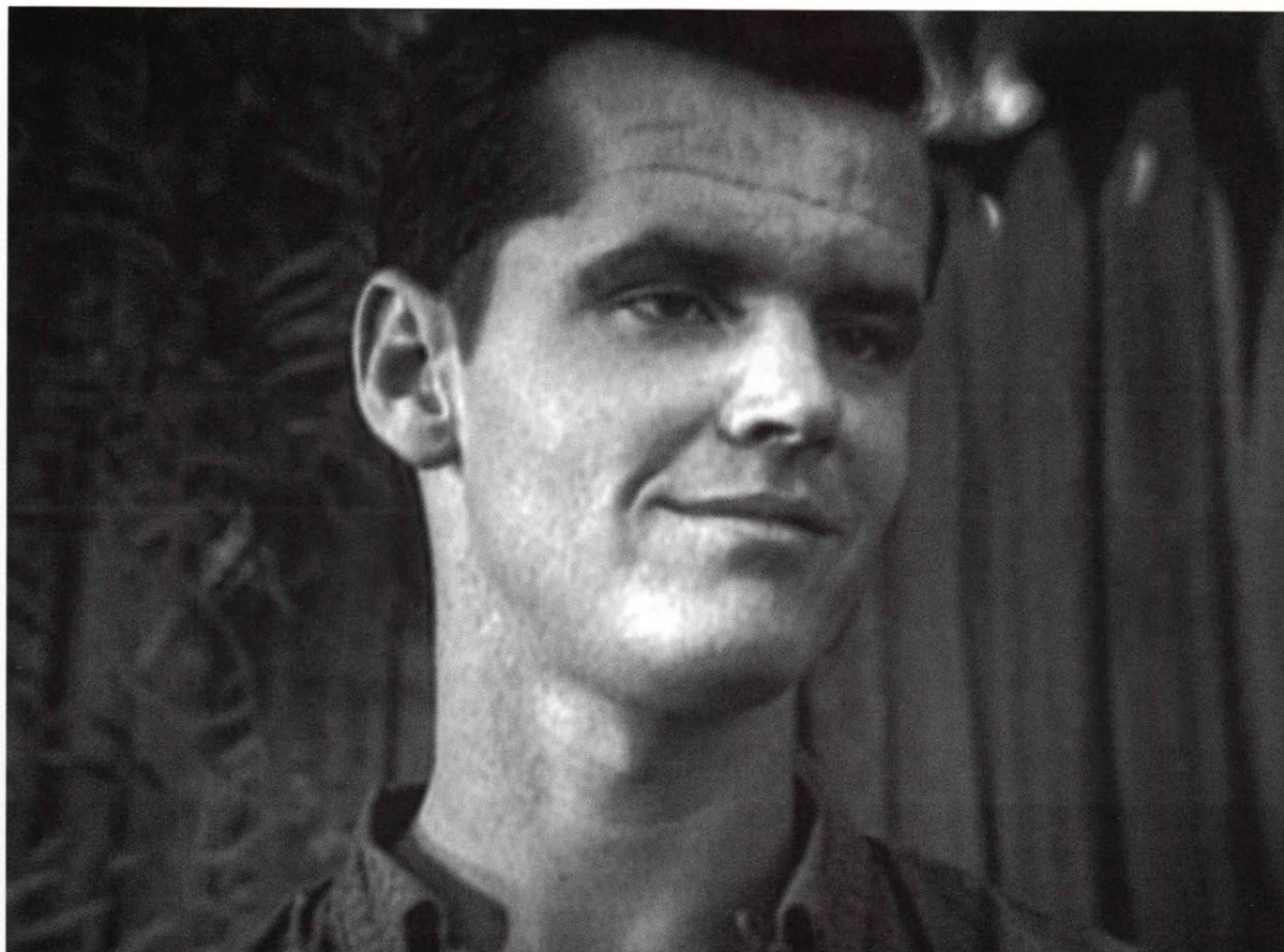
1960, Brentwood Home Video, DD-2.0/+, \$4.99, 59m, DVD-0

By John Charles

In his second lead role (after **THE CRY BABY KILLER**, 1958), Jack Nicholson plays hard-driving punk Johnny Varron, whose sociopathic exploits behind the wheel have every cop in town anxious to slap the cuffs on before he kills someone. However, Johnny's downfall may come not from the law, but from racing buddy Dave (**CREATURE FROM THE HAUNTED SEA**'s Robert Bean), whose sensible girlfriend

Ornery old coot Vincent Price aims to outfox some would-be claim jumpers in THE JACKALS.






*Jack Nicholson yields to no man, woman, or vehicle in **THE WILD RIDE**.*

(**NIGHT OF THE BLOOD BEAST**'s Georgianna Carter) has convinced the youth to abandon Johnny and his gang of thrill-crazy JDs. The story is routine and Harvey Berman's direction pedestrian, but Nicholson gives a charismatic performance and it is great fun hearing ol' Shark Grin drawl hep lines like "Suppose you sound me, man?" and (our favorite) "I want you to put some green stuff on my back."

Like the vast majority of the films produced by Roger Corman's Filmgroup company, **THE WILD RIDE** was never copyrighted and has been issued on tape by numerous companies over the years. The 16mm source material is quite worn, particularly at the reel changes, and the B&W standard frame image is

grainy and overly dark at times, with weak contrasts. The sound has some mild surface noise but no serious problems. It is a bearable presentation but, at an even 59m, the running time is 4m shorter than the commonly reported 63m. The extras are standard for this label: a public domain cartoon (in this case, the very first Casper short, 1945's "The Friendly Ghost," with faded, brownish color), a "DVD Dictionary" explaining various technical terms, a film trivia game bearing no relation to the feature, and DVD-ROM access to four additional games. Brentwood also offers the DVD as part of a set called **BORN TO BE WILD** (\$9.98), which also includes Leslie H. Martinson's **HOT ROD GIRL** (1956), Richard Harbinger's

T-BIRD GANG (1957/59), and Leigh Jason's **THE CHOPPERS** (1961).

Incidentally, **THE WILD RIDE** is also available from Something Weird Video on VHS and DVD-R (\$20.00 ppd) in an edition reportedly culled from 35mm. For curiosity seekers, New Concorde offers an alternate edition of the picture under the title **VELOCITY** (\$19.98). In order to convert the movie into a copyrighted property, New Concorde altered the film's soundtrack and added new bookend sequences, transforming the original footage into a feature length flashback. We have not seen this revision but, as with the company's release of **THE INTRUDER** [VW 74:6], their source material may be the best available for this title. 

Days of Being Wild



Leslie Cheung ✠ 1956-2003

A Tribute by John Charles

When reports began to appear on the Internet declaring that Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing—one of Hong Kong's most popular actor/singers—had taken his own life on April 1, most readers likely responded with a combination of doubt and disgust at a sad, sick joke. Unfortunately, the news was true.

For reasons that have already been the source of endless speculation, Cheung leaped to his death from the 24th floor of a posh hotel. For those who do not follow the HK entertainment scene, it is a challenge not only to relay the magnitude of the tragedy but also to propose a viable Western comparison. HK is full of actors-turned-singers and singers-turned-actors, but precious few attained the success that the seemingly ageless and devilishly handsome Cheung enjoyed for so many years.

Born Cheung Fat-chung on September 12, 1956, Leslie Cheung spent part of his teenage years studying in England but returned to HK when his father developed a fatal illness. In 1977, he took second prize in a local TV network's singing contest and an album soon followed. However, significant success in the music world eluded him until 1982, when his record "The Wind Blows On"

made Cheung a Cantopop icon. As with any HK recording artist who achieves even a modicum of notoriety, Cheung soon tried his hand at movies. On the heels of an innocuous debut in the cheap softcore film **EROTIC DREAMS OF THE RED CHAMBER** (1978) and some TV work, he appeared in a handful of disposable comedies and dramas for Shaw Brothers and Cinema City. One notable exception during this period was **NOMAD** (1982), Patrick Tam Kar-ming's ground-breaking study of disaffected youth produced by Dennis Yu Wan-kong's gutsy, short-lived Century Motion Picture Company. As a rich teen given to unwise experimentation, Cheung delivered his first notable performance and the film remains a potent look at teen life, far different from the big studio fare of the time.

Following several more forgettable roles, Cheung was chosen to play the by-the-book policeman brother of triad Ti Lung in John Woo's **A BETTER TOMORROW** [reviewed VW 47:51].

*Leslie Cheung as the mother-fixated Lothario in Wong Kar-wai's **DAYS OF BEING WILD**, one of the late actor's most memorable roles.*

Although Chow Yun-fat was the main beneficiary of the film's huge success, Cheung's charismatic turn did much to cement his stardom. His status as one of HK's premiere actors was further solidified by his next picture, Tony Ching Siu-tung's revered **A CHINESE GHOST STORY** [VW 48:54], in which Cheung memorably portrayed a naïve but deeply sincere scholar enticed by Joey Wang Tsu-hsien's comely spirit. The actor earned further accolades for his strong performance as Anita Mui Yim-fong's dashing but ultimately disingenuous lover in Stanley Kwan Kam-pang's tragic romance **ROUGE** [VW 45:65], and his portrayal of a deeply troubled Lothario in Wong Kar-wai's **DAYS OF BEING WILD** [VW 85:42] brought Cheung a HK Film Award Best Actor trophy. At a time when male leads in period fantasies were often given to martially gifted performers like Jet Li Lianjie, Cheung's off-beat casting in Ronny Yu Yan-tai's **THE BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR** [VW 48:53] allowed for a successful embodiment of the script's complex hero, who is burdened by far greater anxieties and responsibilities than just defending his clan's honor. The actor's abilities were also adroitly showcased in Wong's captivating **ASHES OF TIME** [VW 50:46] and in the titular role of **THE PHANTOM LOVER** [VW 76:57], Yu's resplendent spin on *THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA*.

Cheung was also a symbol of pride for the Asian gay community; he was HK's only openly gay star. (According to an interview with *TIME ASIA*, he chose the name "Leslie" for its sexual ambiguity and out of admiration for **GONE WITH THE WIND**'s Leslie Howard.) In such a conservative industry where no other actor is openly gay, Cheung's achievements were monumental, particularly when one considers that he specialized in playing the idealized bad boy heartthrob who could win the lifelong devotion of almost any woman. The eulogies proffered by most of the Western press proved typically uninformed, stating that Cheung "specialized in playing gay roles." In actual fact, he essayed only two: tormented Peking Opera performer Cheng Dieyi in Chen Kaige's **FAREWELL, MY CONCUBINE** [VW 24:13] and the self-centered hustler of Wong Kar-wai's **HAPPY TOGETHER** [VW 48:20]. Defying the usual HK cinema approach, Cheung did not camp it up in either picture: the characters were far from admirable, but he interpreted each with sensitivity and his usual effortless proficiency.

Cheung took his roles quite seriously but, like many of his contemporaries, he was not above poking fun at his persona, both on and off screen. Although he and his lover did not actually go public until 1997, the sexual preferences of the star

known to virtually everyone as simply "Leslie" were a very open secret for over a decade. In fact, much of the fun in watching Peter Chan Ho-sun's **HE'S A WOMAN, SHE'S A MAN** [VW 31:15] arises from Cheung's *nudge-nudge* casting and entirely game turn as a homophobe horrified by his attraction to a young male singer (who, unbeknownst to him, is actually a disguised Anita Yuen Wing-yee). By Western standards, hardly a progressive film but, for a HK production, its willingness to celebrate the variety of lifestyles without some underlying caveat and melodramatic rejoinder was positively refreshing.

Offscreen, Cheung did embody some facets of the bitchy stereotype seen so often in local comedies. The cattiest of all HK celebrities, he frequently made disparaging comments about his fellow performers, particularly in regards to aging, a curse from which he seemed divinely immune. Some of Cheung's early concert personas flirted with gender-blending but, for his 2000 tour, he went all out, often performing in a dress, wig, and high heels. Unlike most performers who unashamedly make a spectacle of themselves before the world, Cheung could get away with just about anything because he really was that talented, that magnetic, that sharp, that handsome, and that beloved.

In the wake of a star's death, it is always a temptation to go back through their filmography looking for moments that foreshadowed the end, and those who wish to do so with Cheung will not have to delve very deeply. In addition to the suicidal Dieyi in **CONCUBINE**, Cheung's final role in Law Chi-leung's supernatural thriller **INNER SENSES** (2002) includes a sequence where his character is almost convinced to leap from a building by the ghost of a teenage lover (who committed the same act after he jilted her years before). Cheung reportedly behaved erratically during the filming, leading to the usual HK press foolishness that culminated in the declaration that he may be possessed by actual evil forces on-set. The truth of the matter is that Cheung had been suffering from depression for possibly as long as 20 years and had already tried to kill himself with sleeping pills last winter.

He was a man felled by an all-too-human malady, perhaps the by-product of advancing age (though, even in his mid-40s, he still appeared to be on the lighter side of 30), dissatisfaction with the direction of his career, or some other emotional hurdles he no longer felt up to clearing. Whatever the case, his death further closes the book on HK cinema's golden age, a time when the industry routinely showcased the creative possibilities of mass audience cinema and, in the process, gifted us with some truly indelible stars. 🐾

VIDEO TAPE VINE

John Carpenter Presents Wes Craven's Schoolmate: Los Yahoo

FIST OF FURY: SWORN REVENGE

1995, Tai Seng Entertainment,
HF/SS, \$19.95, VHS
DD-5.1/DTS/MA/ST/+,
\$19.95, DVD-1, 215m 36s
By John Charles

Tai Seng's **FIST OF FURY** [reviewed VW 89:15] was a disastrous attempt to compress a 15 hour miniseries to less than 1/7th of its full length. This release, drawn from the first half of that same ATV series, is also an abridgment but, at just over 3½ hours, is not quite so brutally condensed. This section of the narrative introduces us to Chen Jun (Donnie Yen Chi-tan) and covers his story to the point where the original Bruce Lee film (known in the West as **THE CHINESE CONNECTION**) starts.

Horse thieves raid Jun's village, exterminating the youth's family, with the sole exception of his young sister, Siu-yeen. She and Chen journey to Shanghai, hoping to raise the \$1000 necessary to rebuild their home. He gets a job as a coolie but his employer, Ching gang lieutenant Choi Hok-fu (Eric Wan Tin-chiu), mistreats the workers and uses their wages to pay for a New Year's Day Lion Dance

competition. Jun enters the contest and gets the money returned, thanks to the assistance of kung fu master Fok Yuen-gaap (Eddy Ko Hung). Choi continues to make trouble for Jun and Siu-yeen but, unable to make a living, Jun agrees to join Choi's gang, which is soon in bloody conflict with some Chiuchow mobsters out to gain a foothold in the city. Although he promises Siu-yeen that he will not become too heavily involved, Jun adjusts quickly to his new life and is goaded by

A NOTE ON TIMINGS

The timings listed for the following tapes reflect only the length of the film itself, and do not include such ephemera as video company logos, FBI warnings, supplementary trailers, or MPAA ratings certificates. The only exceptions to this rule are those films in which the soundtrack is first heard while the distributor's logo is still onscreen.

KEY

+	Supplements
16:9	WS TV Adaptable
CC	Closed Captioned
D	Digital
DD	Dolby Digital
DTS	Digital Theater Systems (Audio)
DVD-0	No Region Code
DVD-1	USA, Canada
DVD-2	Europe, Japan
DVD-3	Most of Asia
HF	Hi-Fi
LB	Letterboxed
MA	Multiple Audio
NSR	No Suggested Retail
OOP	Out of Print
P&S	Pan&Scan
S	Stereo
SS	Surround Sound
ST	Subtitles



The early years of martial arts master Chen Jun (Donnie Yen) unfold in FIST OF FURY: SWORN REVENGE.

Choi into challenging Master Fok. The mobster is just using Jun to further his own ends, of course, and strikes a plan with the horse thieves (who include Xiong Xinxin/Hung Yan-yan) to eliminate Jun and Fok. After the subsequent skirmishes, Jun leaves the Chings and plans to return to the simple life. However, he accepts an invitation from Fok to join his Jin Wu school and pursue the teacher's dream of uniting all of China's martial arts schools. Jin Wu is a prize coveted dearly by Choi and he does everything within his power to take it over. Jun must also contend with Jin Wu's contentious senior student (Berg Ng Ting-yip), who

is jealous of his increasing prowess.

The condensation is a little smoother than its predecessor, but there are still very noticeable jumps in the storyline—Chen has hardly started his new job before he is shown leading a protest over unpaid wages! The post-production acceleration of the martial arts is not so distracting this time and Yen's fight with Xiong approaches the excitement regularly generated by the bouts in the former's late '80s/early '90s work. The plotting incorporates numerous genre clichés (a fixed lion dance competition, smugglers, Chiuchow extortion gangs, and a cartoonish villain

whose humiliations the hero must repeatedly tolerate) but, by the same token, the incorporation of these time-honored elements provides the perfect rationale for the various fights, so it is easily seen why they appear over and over again. The soundtrack includes music from numerous films, including **DRAGON: THE BRUCE LEE STORY**, Zhang Yimou's **TO LIVE**, Tsui Hark's **THE LOVERS**, the live action **STREET FIGHTER** movie with Jean-Claude Van Damme, and a portion of the **ENTER THE DRAGON** theme.

Tai Seng's two-tape release presents the English-dubbed version, while their double-disc DVD set offers the English track



Jon Bon Jovi (left) and Diego Luna survey the smoking remains of a sun-blasted bloodsucker in JOHN CARPENTER PRESENTS VAMPIRES: LOS MUERTOS.

remixed in 5.1, plus Cantonese in 5.1 and DTS, and optional English subtitles. The PAL converted video image generally looks sharp and detailed, with occasional, minor master tape wear. The stereo remixes add some nice separations and a reasonable amount of power to what were originally barebones mono soundtracks.

A Bey Logan/Donnie Yen commentary is included on the DVDs and, true to form, the former manages to keep talking for the entire 216m. Logan and Yen are old friends and the mood is jokey and informal throughout, with a multitude of topics covered: anecdotes about the making of the series, the other performers, the different versions of **FIST OF FURY**, Bruce Lee's philosophies, the demands and limitations of HK TV productions, etc. The talk is slightly out of sync, running a few seconds ahead of the picture, but there are only a handful of errors (eg. Logan misidentifies the **STREET FIGHTER** cue as being music

especially composed for this production) and the discussion is quite satisfying. Additional extras consist of the same 21m 39s "Making Of..." documentary from the earlier release, a Yen filmography, and several trailers for other Tai Seng DVDs.

JOHN CARPENTER PRESENTS VAMPIRES: LOS MUERTOS

aka VAMPIRES: LOS MUERTOS
2002, Columbia TriStar Home Video, HF/SS/CC, \$14.95, VHS DD-5.1/MA/16:9/LB/CC/+, \$24.95, DVD-1, 93m 10s
By John Charles

A DTV follow-up to the modestly successful 1998 theatrical release **JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES** [VW 51:64], this effort shares the same basic premise, but none of the characters. Rock star Jon Bon Jovi toplines as vampire hunter Derek Bliss, a member of the mercenary Van Helsing Group, which hires itself out to any group (religious or otherwise) willing to

meet their fee. Their latest job is bankrolled by an anonymous interest and, when Bliss tries to assemble a team in Mexico, each prospective hunter is slaughtered before Bliss can hire them. During his travels, Bliss meets up with Zoey (**LOST HIGHWAY**'s Natasha Wagner, having dropped the "Gregson" from her name), a bite victim who is able to walk around safely during the day, thanks to an experimental drug. The hunters were killed by female vampire master Una (**BLADE**'s Arly Jover), who seems able to tap into Bliss' mind and anticipate his moves. Una now has in her possession the Black Cross of Berzier (the relic also sought by Thomas Ian Griffith's master in the original), which vampires believe can give them power to walk in daylight, via the "Reverse Exorcism." Joined by Father Rodrigo (Cristian de la Fuente), enthusiastic teenager Sancho (**Y tu mama tambien**'s Diego Luna), and gun aficionado Ray Collins (Darius McCrary), Bliss

heads out in search of the main nest, guided by Zoey (who also has a connection to Una). Una steals Zoey's medicine and, after taking a gigantic dose, is able to endure the light for a short time. To ensure a steady supply of the drug, she kidnaps the girl, luring the slayers into what seems like a suicide mission; however, Bliss concocts a radical plan that may give him a shot at success.

Longtime Carpenter associate Tommy Lee Wallace (**HAL-LOWEEN III: SEASON OF THE WITCH**) serves as writer/director this time out, with Carpenter sharing what one suspects is a mostly ornamental credit as co-executive producer with his wife, Sandy King. The first picture started off excitingly and then died a slow death, but **LOS MUERTOS** is flatline all the way through. While it certainly represented nothing new for him, James Woods gave a dynamic performance as the protagonist in the original; by contrast, Jon Bon Jovi is a blank slate, lacking in authority and (surprisingly) charisma, and Jover merely strikes poses. Being the sole African-American in the cast, McCrary's fate is sealed even before he makes his clichéd entrance and Wagner is more aggravating than capricious. The gore level has been reduced from the original and the KNB effects work is standard; a few key instances of bloodletting are rendered with third-rate CGI. Wallace relies so much on dreams and premonitions to advance the story, it feels like he did a first draft and then re-used this device from Carpenter's film to compensate for absent motivation. He incorporates a few interesting concepts (instead of using coffins, some of the vampires simply bury themselves in the ground,

then claw their way to the surface at nightfall like zombies), but **LOS MUERTOS** never quite justifies its existence, ending up as a half-hearted (and budgeted) replay of a film that only possessed a few assets itself.

Though the 1998 film was shot in Carpenter's preferred Panavision, Wallace has utilized the standard screen-friendly Super 35. The VHS image looks well-defined, with detailed low-light sequences, and solid hues. The double-sided DVD includes this version and a more satisfyingly composed anamorphic 2.35:1 rendering. The stereo mix is a bit more elaborate than most DTV features, with good dimensionality and a fairly effective use of the surround channels; the DVD's 5.1 option naturally offers a heightened and more effective soundscape. Wallace (who appears briefly as "Scared Guy") provides a commentary, discussing what he tried to accomplish, the obstacles he faced from the studio (which made him drop much of the humor), as well as changes required by budgetary limitations and an inexperienced Mexican crew. The director mentions that he is watching a preliminary version of the picture and hopes that some missing material and effects will be restored for the final release, but Destination Films apparently overruled him, as we seem to be looking at the same compromised edition. Regarding a sequence where a trio of vampires massacre an equally small number of bar patrons, Wallace comments that the bit doesn't work because "it's neither fish nor fowl, it really needed to be radically, crazily violent and absurd and sexual in order to be worth having in the movie." Both **NEAR DARK** (1987) and **FROM DUSK TILL DAWN** (1996) had very similar scenes that did deliver those

elements, and this implied failure of the film to live up to its director's vision perfectly encapsulates the problem with **LOS MUERTOS** as a whole. English closed captions are provided on both tape and disc, plus the latter offers subtitles in that language, French, Traditional Chinese, Thai, and Korean. Trailers for this film, **JOHN CARPENTER'S GHOSTS OF MARS**, and **BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA** round out the DVD.

MY SCHOOLMATE THE BARBARIAN

Ngor dik ye maan tung hok
(Cantonese)

Wo de ye man tong xue
(Mandarin)

"My Wild Schoolmate"

2001, Tai Seng Entertainment,
HF/SS/LB/ST, VHS

DD-5.1/DTS/MA/LB/ST/+,
DVD-0, \$19.95, 92m 46s

By John Charles

Anyone familiar with Japanese pop culture knows that high school is a frequent setting for all manner of comedy, horror, science fiction, fantasy, and adult films, along with *manga*, and *anime*. This Film Power production is a HK entry in the cycle that functions as a considerably milder spin on **BATTLE ROYALE** (2000), as well as anticipating the far more ambitious and expensive South Korean fantasy **VOLCANO HIGH** (also 2001).

Framed for attempted rape by a former girlfriend, rich, brainy student Edward Chan (**GEN-X COPS'** Stephen Fung Tak-lun) appears doomed to finish his education at dilapidated Ting Bing Sing Memorial High School, the absolute worst institution in HK. The terminally polite Edward is soon bullied unmercifully by the local toughs, who all but run the school and settle disputes in "The Ring," which consists of 55



*Nicholas Tse demonstrates that the bat is mightier than the pen
in MY SCHOOLMATE THE BARBARIAN.*

desks pushed together. The combatants fight barefoot under the whirling ceiling fans and there is only one rule: "You fall, you lose." Edward ends up hugging the floor after one blow, so he hires former "Fight King" Rock (smoothly played by current HK cinema bad boy Nicholas Tse Ting-fung) to be his bodyguard/trainer. Soon a close friend, Edward tutors Rock for the big exam, but the latter's vow to never fight again is under constant threat from TBS' current ring king, Mantis (**HIT TEAM's** Samuel Pang King-chi). Edward also has his own problems when a group of triads kidnap him in an attempt to extort HK\$100 million from his family.

Co-directed by the ever-prolific Wong Jing and Billy Chung Siu-hung (**THE ASSASSIN**), this is a minor but moderately entertaining effort, notable mostly for Tony Ching Siu-tung's hard-hitting action choreography.

The majority of martial arts battles in HK cinema these days are enhanced with ample doses of CGI. There is some effects trickery present here, but the fights are usually quite invigorating, with the stars doing most of their own stunts. On a less noteworthy level, the climactic battle incorporates elements from video games, a concept Wong Jing utilized previously in **CITY HUNTER** and **FUTURE COPS** (both 1993) and he has clearly exhausted any and all of the comedic potential from this approach. Unlike some directorial collaborations, the viewer has no trouble discerning that Chung is responsible for the movie's darker material (while comedy dominates the picture and no one actually dies, some of the violence here *is* quite intense and bloody), while Wong handled the rest and is presumably responsible for popstar Joey Yung

Tso-yi's outlandish, anime-inspired performance as a classmate obsessed with Edward. Wong also works in some of his customary topical humor, via parodies of **WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE?** and **THE WEAKEST LINK**, both of which were hot in HK at the time.

There are plenty of speckles and some dirt notable in the opening minutes, but the picture improves after that. Colors are robust but contrasts are a bit weak and the 1.68:1 image tends to be grainy during brightly-lit sequences. The Cantonese language/English subtitled tape has a functional but unexciting sound mix. The DVD offers a somewhat more dynamic rendering of that language in both 5.1 and DTS, Mandarin in 2.0, and optional English subtitles. While we would normally recommend the Canto audio, it is a half second out-of-sync throughout, so the

DVD's Mandarin dubtrack offers a less distracting presentation. Ric Meyers and Frank Djeng discuss the film on a fairly informative commentary track that concentrates on the background of the performers, with a good amount of time devoted to the widely reported legal problems experienced recently by Tse and Yung. Meyers' usual digressions are present, but all of the websites used for reference get their proper due. The original HK trailer and an American video promo spot are included, along with promos for **DRAGON INN** and **THE DUEL**. There is a smoothly executed layer change at 53:43.

WES CRAVEN'S SUMMER OF FEAR

aka **STRANGER IN OUR HOUSE, SUMMER OF FEAR**

1978, Artisan Entertainment, HS/SS/CC, VHS

DD-5.1 & 2.0/MA/ST/+,

DVD-1, \$14.98, 98m 1s

By John Charles

After helming the graphic, down-and-dirty 16mm productions **THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT** (1972) and **THE HILLS HAVE EYES** (1977), Wes Craven seemed an unlikely candidate for a network assignment. Regardless, he was tapped to helm this made-for-TV adaptation of Lois Duncan's popular young adult novel **SUMMER OF FEAR**. Linda Blair stars as teenage equestrian Rachel Bryant, whose affluent family takes in Julia (Lee Purcell), a cousin from the Ozarks, after the girl's parents die in a car crash. Rachel is slightly bothered by the shy and somewhat mysterious girl, and that uneasiness increases when her horse leaps out of the family corral and clearly attempts to kill Julia. As the guest's confidence



Witch Lee Purcell is hellbent on preserving her secret by destroying rival Linda Blair in WES CRAVEN'S **SUMMER OF FEAR**.

increases, so do Rachel's misfortunes, and when the latter discovers what appear to be the remnants of witchcraft, her suspicions become even more pronounced. Not surprisingly, no one will believe the girl's claims that Julia is marshalling supernatural forces, but she has an ally in elderly Professor Jarvis (**THESE ARE THE DAMNED**'s Macdonald Carey), an expert in the occult. However, in the end, it may be up to Rachel alone to dispel the evil that has entered her home.

We have not read the source novel, but it's easy to see why teenagers would respond so well to the scenario of a strange young relative entering into their lives and gradually winning over family and friends to the point that they all but steal the original sibling's identity. However, touches that probably worked on paper (eg. Julia's backwoods Arkansas

accent and colloquialisms returning whenever she loses her cool) come across as heavy-handed, and all aspects of the story are spelled out so clearly, tedium sets in by the third commercial break fade-out. Like the screenplay, the performances are competent but lack subtlety, and TV budget constraints are often in evidence (the Bryants own a large stretch of land and a corral but live in an amusingly tiny house, Rachel's "big" equestrian event is attended by maybe 15 people, a preponderance of obvious stock shots, etc). Ultimately, this is just a footnote in Craven's career and, even considering the network Standards and Practices constraints under which he was obliged to work, his direction offers little that would differentiate **SUMMER OF FEAR** from the work of other TV movie specialists at



Claude King hopes to kiss more than babies in his run for the Senate in Herschell Gordon Lewis' YEAR OF THE YAHOO!

the time. Jeremy Slate (**THE HOOKED GENERATION**), Jeff East (**DEADLY BLESSING**), and a very young Fran Drescher co-star.

The film premiered on NBC in a slightly re-edited version called **STRANGER IN OUR HOUSE**, while Craven's original cut was released to overseas theaters in 1979 as **SUMMER OF FEAR**. As the title of their version reveals, Artisan has utilized the latter, with the "Wes Craven" possessive added to the packaging to increase its commercial potential. While it could not be mistaken for a contemporary effort, the standard frame image looks better than you would expect for a 25 year-old TV movie, and is no doubt superior to the old

Thorn-EMI cassette. The source material has light but persistent speckles, as well as some horizontal jitter, but the image is fairly sharp and usually attractive, with nice colors and detail as vivid as the original cinematography allows. The original mono track has been remixed, lending some dimension to the score, though the rear channels are predominantly silent.

Craven and co-writer/co-producer Max A. Keller reminisce about the film on an easygoing, reasonably informative commentary track. The pair mistakenly state that Carey died "a year or two" after filming (it was actually closer to 17 years) but, otherwise, offer some interesting anecdotes about the production. Craven acknowledges a debt to Roman

Polanski, particularly **THE TENANT**, while Keller talks about the project's background and how Craven came to be chosen. They also point out the bits that network censors originally wanted eliminated. Even uncut, the PG-13 rating this video edition received seems unjustified, though not as absurd as the "X" certificate the BBFC forced upon the movie for its release in that country! English captions are available on both media, while the disc includes abbreviated director and cast filmographies, and trailers for **WENDIGO**, **LEGION OF THE DEAD**, **SLEEPLESS**, and **HELL'S GATE**. The Canadian DVD from Alliance Atlantis Home Video is identical, save for the inclusion of a 2.0 French track instead of the 2.0 English one.

YEAR OF THE YAHOO!

1971, *Something Weird Video*, (HF/+ VHS), (D/+ DVD-R), \$20.00 ppd., 88m 7s

By John Charles

A few of Herschell Gordon Lewis' films remain missing in action, but the director has often mentioned that the one he most wanted to see rescued from oblivion was **YEAR OF THE YAHOO!**, a political satire/country music extravaganza. After many years of digging, *Something Weird Video* finally has succeeded in locating a 35mm print, which the company now offers on VHS and DVD-R.

Stuffy Democratic senator incumbent Burwell (Robert Swain) seems ready to coast to an easy re-election in his southern constituency. However, the President dispatches insufferable Washington image consultant Sid Angelo (**THE WIZARD OF GORE**'s Ray Sager, at his oily best) to convince good ole boy Republican governor Baxter (**TWO THOUSAND MANIACS**' Jeffrey Allen) that their best defense is to run clean-cut Country & Western singer Hank Jackson (Claude King) for the office. With Sid's hard sell and Hank's image overhaul (which includes jettisoning his frilly wardrobe), the Republicans are soon poised to mount a genuine challenge in November. However, Hank's fiancée (Ronna Riddle) objects to the way his image is being manipulated to satisfy the redneck constituency, particularly when he disses welfare cheats and rent strikers on live TV broadcasts. When a face-off between a neglectful landlord and his suffering tenants turns into a riot, Hank begins to have serious doubts about where his campaign is headed.

THE YEAR OF THE YAHOO! (onscreen title) actually played

some venues on the bottom of a double bill with Lewis' **THE GORE GORE GIRLS** [reviewed VW 65:48] and it is hard to imagine stranger bedfellows. Aside from an innocuous, out-of-place sex scene (which earned the movie an "R" from the MPAA), **YAHOO** is a family picture with one-dimensional characters and political satire that would not go over the head of the dimmest voter. Like several of Lewis' protagonists from this period, Hank is a strange hybrid: a he-man country singer in Liberace hand-me-downs who pals around with hippie friends who treat him with undisguised contempt. Louisiana native King (who enjoyed a crossover hit in 1962 with "Wolverton Mountain") is a bit stiff, but likeable enough, and it is easy to see why the director has a soft spot for the picture. All of the usual debits are here (sluggish pacing, awkwardly framed and static setups, amateur actors struggling to remember their lines), so those who fail to find value in Lewis' other films certainly won't be swayed by it. Nevertheless, with its pork barrel stereotypes and amusingly naïve depiction of the counterculture, the film is a curiously charming artifact of its time and succeeds as painless drive-in fodder in the way that Lewis' earlier hillbilly musical, **MOONSHINE MOUNTAIN** (1964), proved similarly disarming. Four of the star's songs were penned by the director (as "Sheldon Seymour"), including the catchy theme song, "Musician—Politician" ("Just vote for me and soon you'll see how everyone...relaaaaxes"). Daniel Krough (co-author of **THE AMAZING HERSCHELL GORDON LEWIS**) was first unit cameraman and appears briefly, while

HGL can be heard as a TV announcer. Ever the fried chicken booster, Lewis includes a throwaway scene outside of a Church's restaurant.

A lost film virtually since the time of its original release, **YEAR OF THE YAHOO!** is something that we (at least those of us who care) should be grateful to be seeing at all. It is hard to be too critical of SWV's standard transfer, but to be descriptive, the film has survived with vertical scratches, some light speckling, and moderately faded color. We also noticed slight artifacting in some solid backgrounds. In addition to a noisy opening reel, the sound is a half second out-of-sync throughout. That said, the presentation's flaws don't interfere too seriously and the image looks a lot cleaner than some of SWV's earlier Lewis titles, like **MOONSHINE MOUNTAIN** and **JUST FOR THE HELL OF IT**. As part of their ongoing distribution deal with Image Entertainment, SWV will be releasing **YEAR OF THE YAHOO!** on a double feature DVD in September with Lewis' **THIS STUFF'LL KILL YA!** (1971) and the usual plethora of extras. One imagines that most of these current blemishes will be digitally corrected prior to its release, along with the erasure of the SWV logo from the bottom right corner.

There is no mention on the packaging, but SWV has also included HGL's early '60s nudie one-reeler **HOT NIGHT AT THE GO GO LOUNGE** (9m 59s), along with a B&W short featuring an all-girl orchestra. (Warning: the audio is much louder in the latter segment than on the rest of the disc.) The SP-mode disc features 17 chapters placed about every 5m that do not mark anything specific, and the keep case includes liner notes by Frank Henenlotter.





The Film Bulletin Reviews, 1969-1974

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DEADLY SWEET

Frenetic, amusing mystery-comedy import (Italian) loaded with cinematic trickery. Might click with youth audience, especially film buffs. Rated X.

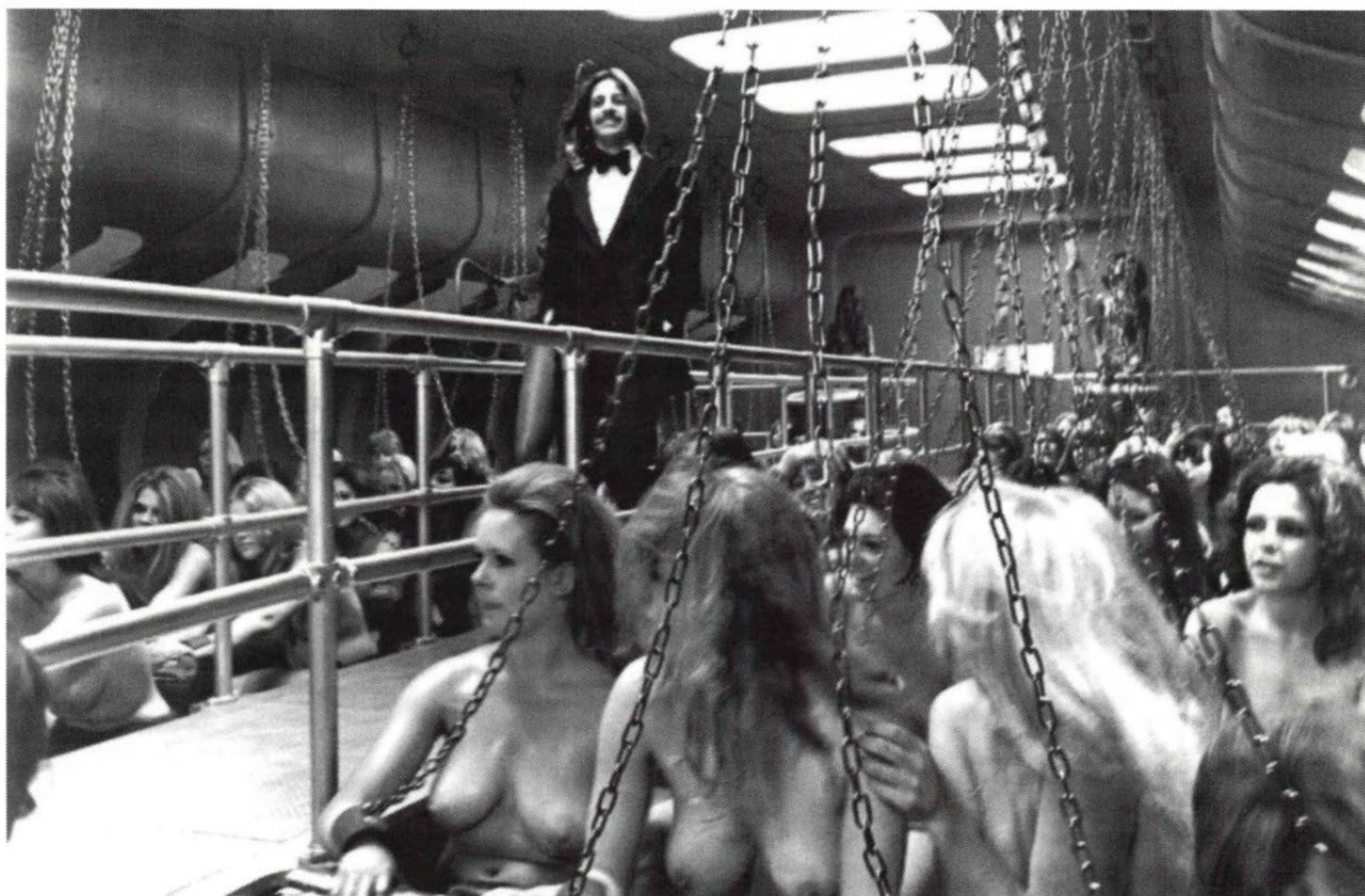
Seeming initially like nothing more than an Italian look at the myth of Swinging London, **DEADLY SWEET** soon settles down into an off-beat, tricky and amusing put-on of movie styles and traditions, somewhat reminiscent of Alain Robbe-Grillet's **TRANS-EUROPE EXPRESS**, at times like an improved remake of **BREATHLESS**, and now and then like a filmed issue of MAD Magazine. Indeed, the slight screenplay, more a series of classic situations than a story, probably will seem puzzling and nonsensical to mature audiences outside of metropolitan "art" markets.

Working, incredibly enough, from an actual novel (THE PAPER TOMB by Sergio Donati), writer/director Tinto Brass utilizes split-screen effects, B&W and tinted inserts, pop-art and "psychedelic" trappings which by now seem slightly dated, convoluted time, allusions to and parodies of other movies (including, of course, **BLOW-UP**), political gags and at least one play on a four-letter word. The dubbed Films Distributing Corp. import will find its best niche with specialized audiences, especially the growing legions of film buffs in the college and young adult markets, which often go more for arresting cinematics than a coherent storyline. The X rating, stemming from two brief but highly engaging frontal nude shots of Ewa (**CANDY**) Aulin, and a few moderately—but not overly—steamy love scenes, opens up drive-in and ballyhoo market possibilities.

Jean-Louis Trintignant, known best for his role in **A MAN AND A WOMAN**, is stoic and funny as an evocation of all movie heroes, suffering grandly and righteously when one of the villains pulls out his eyelashes to make him talk. Trintignant is on the run with Miss Aulin after finding a corpse, pursued by shadowy criminals who want a diary he stole from the murdered man's room. The kiss-kiss-bang-bang fantasy of the film occasionally collides interestingly with real life, as in a chase scene shot at a dog race with the unknowing crowds seemingly believing it's for real. It's this relationship between fantasy and reality which Brass apparently finds most intriguing. Perhaps mirroring the attitudes of his desired audience, Brass has Trintignant and Miss Aulin at a cinema at one point to discuss the details of the "mystery," but they seem more interested in the violent war newsreels on the screen. The ending, in which Miss Aulin is revealed as the killer (surprise!), featuring a switch on the old "See, you can't shoot the man you love" bit, is clever but too abrupt. Silvano Ippoliti's bright, flashy photography and Armando Travajoli's catchy score round out a likeably frenetic commercial-art package.

1969. *Cul cuore in gala*. Films Distributing Corp. Technicolor. 101 minutes. Jean-Louis Trintignant, Ewa Aulin, Vira Silenti, Charles Kohler. Produced by Ermanno Donati, Luigi Carpentieri. Directed by Tinto Brass.

Actually produced in 1967 but not picked up for US distribution till '69, **DEADLY SWEET** is famous, among those who have seen it, as the movie where a guy gets shot and falls dead next to a copy of **MONSTERS TO LAUGH WITH**. Never given an official video release, this film—like Brass's other work from this period (eg. the brilliant **Nerosubianco** and **L'urlo**) are cult films fully deserving of rediscovery here in America. Trash Palace Video (www.trashpalace.com) sells an Italian language copy without English subtitles, on VHS or DVD-R, for \$18.00 plus \$4.00 P&H.



Ringo Starr's cruise is pushed along with a little help from his friends in THE MAGIC CHRISTIAN. (Mom, Dad! Don't worry! It's rated GP!)

THE MAGIC CHRISTIAN

Labored, nihilistic anti-Establishment satire by Terry Southern probably will amuse the youthful audience, while proving offensive to most over-30's. Peter Sellers and Ringo Starr add to its drawing power in hip metropolitan markets. Rated GP.

"These are strange times we live in, son," Peter Sellers advises his adopted vagrant son, Ringo Starr. "Each man does his best." In **THE MAGIC CHRISTIAN**, Sellers—as silver-haired Sir Guy Grand, the richest man in the world—contributes to the strangeness while setting out to expose hypocrisy, cant and conformity via monstrous put-ons and colossal japes aimed at mortifying the Establishment. **THE MAGIC CHRISTIAN** itself seems like one of them.

Based on Terry Southern's typically irreverent novel, the humor level of this overdone British satire too often descends to the sophomoric, and some sequences will be viewed as horrendously tasteless, particularly by the over-30 audience, which is likely to echo frequently one of the film's oft-repeated lines, "What is going on here?!"

However, the star power of Sellers and Beatle Starr will draw the hip metropolitan youth audience in substantial numbers, and most will respond favorably to the film's scattershot comedy and sense of campy nihilism, with the blandishment of cameo bits by several frame players providing additional ballyhoo lures. With this vital audience segment behind it, this Commonwealth United release could be a big grosser. But since the picture makes its hardly-novel point that every man has his price quite early on, and never really becomes witty or incisive enough to sustain itself thereafter, the general mass trade will probably find it all more confusing than funny.

Joseph McGrath is an interesting, if undisciplined director, whose fragmented style produces a few striking and amusing moments within a formless hodgepodge structure. The main problem is the confused screenplay by Southern, McGrath and Sellers (with additional material by John Cleese and Graham Chapman), evincing a contempt for the characters which gives the ridicule an unpleasant tone as cruel as it is forced. Inclusion of newsreel footage of the execution of a Vietcong prisoner by a South Vietnamese officer marks a new low in comedic

"instant significance." The picture is mostly a random series of episodic routines sparked by Sellers' Grand Plan, calculated to demonstrate that there is nothing a man won't do for money, although this is less clear onscreen than it should have been. Some of these sequences come off, but most misfire: Laurence Harvey is persuaded to strip while reciting Hamlet's soliloquy, to the chagrin of a staid Stratford audience; Sellers rubs caviar all over his face at a posh restaurant, bribes traffic warden Spike Milligan to eat his parking ticket, and pays the Oxford team to wreck the Oxford-Cambridge boat race. Among the better bits are a grouse hunt with tanks and flame-throwers, a dog show at which a strange new breed eats up the other contestants, and a frenetic art auction at Sotheby's. A TV boxing match between two homosexuals is a long buildup to a dud punchline, while other lavender bits include an unbilled Yul Brynner in cabaret drag singing "Mad About the Boy" to Roman Polanski aboard the "in" luxury liner S.S. Magic Christian. On its maiden voyage to New York, Sellers and Starr outrage the passengers with surreal pandemonium, such as drunken captain Wilfrid Hyde-White, Christopher Lee as an impressive ship's vampire, a rampaging gorilla, Leonard Frey as an unctuous psychiatrist who badgers a bewildered middle-ager into smoking a joint and then reveals himself as a narcotics agent, and an engine room full of topless slave girl rowers overseen by a spectacular whip-wielding Raquel Welch in, alas, an all-too-brief appearance. When the ship abruptly "docks," the hysterical passengers discover it is merely an elaborate mock-up which never left a London warehouse. As a final gesture, Sellers and Starr fill a portable swimming pool with a noxious yellow mixture of urine, blood and excrement to which they add free money, and watch as numerous bowler-hatted types greedily descend into the muck to get rich. Having made their point several times over, both bed down in the park, bribing a guard to let them stay there.

For the most part, **THE MAGIC CHRISTIAN** is weird and screwball without being especially funny, and shoots down its easy targets with a satiric overkill which belabors the obvious. Sellers gets the most out of a vague role. Ringo is mostly limited to Richard Lester-ish asides, and it's primarily the incidentals and odd bits of dialogue which provide amusement. Others who get a brief look-in are Richard Attenborough, Dennis Price, John LeMesurier and Victor Maddern. Geoffrey Unsworth's color photography, Assheton Gorton's production design and Wally Veevers'

special effects are all first-class. Ken Thorne's pleasant music score and the use of "Come and Get It" by Paul McCartney further enhance the film's youth-oriented marketability.

1969. Commonwealth United (A Grand Film). Technicolor. 92 minutes. Peter Sellers, Ringo Starr. Producer Denis O'Dell. Directed by Joseph McGrath.

Originally released on VHS and LD by Republic Pictures Home Video and Image Entertainment, **THE MAGIC CHRISTIAN** recently made its DVD debut through Artisan Entertainment in a standard, non-anamorphic transfer (\$14.90).

ONE MORE TIME

Comedy sequel to **SALT & PEPPER** lacks wit, amusement of its predecessor. Should open OK, but word-of-mouth will relegate it to dual bills. Sammy Davis and Peter Lawford for marquee. Rated GP.

This vapid, witless comedy sequel will disappoint those who enjoyed 1968's **SALT & PEPPER**. Stolidly directed by comedian Jerry Lewis, in his first attempt at helming a non-Lewis vehicle, **ONE MORE TIME** will attract initial attention in markets where the previous Sammy Davis, Jr.-Peter Lawford epic was well-received, but word-of-mouth probably will relegate the British-made United Artists release to double-billing in undemanding situations.

Davis and Lawford are again Charlie Salt and Chris Pepper, lovable rakes, with Lawford doing double duty as his own snobby twin, Lord Sydney, heir to the palatial Pepperworth family castle. Down-at-the-heels Lawford assumes his brother's identity when he finds the latter murdered, thus unwittingly becoming the target of ruthless diamond smugglers and Interpol agents, both groups after the brother for double-crossing them and making off with a fortune in diamonds. That's about all Michael Pertwee has supplied in the way of plot, the rest being primarily a collection of well-worn gags about the British upper crust, life in the castle, country clubs and fox hunts interspersed with farcical melodramatics which will get by only with youngsters. The better sight gags are extended far beyond the comic point.

Apparently, Lewis' idea of directing someone else's vehicle is to overuse the zoom lens, shoot from overhead whenever possible and have Davis mimic familiar reactions, impersonations and spastic routines from old Martin & Lewis pictures—not, alas, the better ones. An attempt to choreograph Davis' movements to "Thus Spake Zarathustra" at one point is especially uninspired and badly executed. Likewise, an unbilled guest appearance

by Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee (as Dr. Frankenstein and Dracula, respectively), serves only to induce another fit of hysterical mugging from Davis. Acting more himself, Davis warbles a couple of pace-flattening songs, mostly out of sync. After a final shoot-out, the stars step out of character in an ending reminiscent of Lewis' **THE PATSY** and assure the dozing audience they will return in a new adventure soon. Ernest W. Steward's DeLuxe Color photography is attractive.

1970. United Artists (A Chrislaw Trace-Mark Production). DeLuxe Color. 92 minutes. Sammy Davis, Jr., Peter Lawford. Produced by Milton Ebbins. Directed by Jerry Lewis.

Nice Jack Davis one-sheet, though. Salt and Pepper never made good their promise to return—not even on video.

PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT

Reputation of Philip Roth's controversial best-seller about sex hang-ups of Jewish male should get off to strong openings in metropolitan markets, particularly where ethnic population is heavy. Subdued direction may disappoint some, but raunchy dialogue will amuse younger trades, upset more staid types. Rated R.

Although those who tend to consider Philip Roth's best-selling novel one of the seven pillars of wisdom are rapt to be disappointed at the inexplicitness of

the film version, this slick Warner Bros. release is likely to amuse a broad audience spectrum consisting of casual readers of the novel, sensation seekers and those merely curious as to how the sex life of a compulsive masturbator could be filmed at all.

Writer-director Ernest Lehman's solution is to cut away discreetly from any carnal activities and concentrate all the raunchiness in the dialogue, much of which will have open-minded audiences (especially the younger segment) laughing while embarrassing more conservative viewers. The language, a lot of it verbatim from the book, is unprecedentedly blunt, but visually the film is no more offensive than, for instance, **THE GRADUATE**. Nudity is limited to about eight seconds, including a long three-way bed scene shot in such dark, arty style it's impossible to tell who is doing what to whom. Business, at least initially, should be strong in urban, suburban and collegiate situations where the book's notoriety will fan interest. Naturally, even better grosses will be forthcoming in situations catering to a large Jewish population. The subject matter will make it an exploitable item for the less sophisticated markets as well, where its sometimes low-level comedies will find an appreciative audience. More discriminating viewers will probably come away with mixed feelings.

Most of Alexander Portnoy's more memorably perverse sex escapades, such as his affair with a



Hey, hey, it's Karen Black... as The Monkey, Richard Benjamin's dream girl in the film version of PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT.

piece of liver that eventually found its way to the family dinner table, are condensed into one soliloquy. Richard Benjamin is as adequate a Portnoy as possible. Karen Black overshadows everyone with a very fine portrayal of "The Monkey," a vacant-minded, illiterate *shikse* model who happens to be the forbidden girl of Portnoy's dreams. One of Hollywood's top writers, Lehman gets his first directorial effort off to a rocky start with an opening fantasy sequence in which Portnoy undresses a woman in his mind that owes more to Russ Meyer than to Philip Roth. Indeed, while the direction does improve as the picture progresses, Lehman must bear the blame for the obvious weaknesses in conception and style. Portnoy relates the entire story to his impassive psychiatrist. As a teenager, tormented by a monstrous Jewish mother (Lee Grant) and a congenitally constipated father (Jack Somack), the constantly horny teenage Portnoy spends most of his time in the bathroom masturbating into the dirty clothes (the camera stays on the parents, worrying about their son's apparent acute diarrhea). Favored at long last with a "hand job" from the luscious Bubbles Girardi (Jeannie Berlin), Portnoy gets some of it in his eye and fantasizes that he'll go blind or that he'll catch "the syph" and his penis will drop off. Years older, but no less neurotic, Portnoy picks up The Monkey and their insatiable sex drives intermingle at a Vermont resort and later in Italy, where Portnoy picks up a hooker for a three-way bed romp that leaves The Monkey feeling humiliated. After plenty of arguing and acrimony, he refuses to marry her and she threatens to jump from a hotel window in Athens. Haunted by the heavenly voice of John Carradine, accusing him of murder and worse, the guilt-ridden Portnoy flees to Israel where his attempt to finally seduce a Jewish girl (Jill Clayburgh) ends in near-rape and impotence. As Portnoy leaves the doctor's office, we see that, although he's been assailed by visions of The Monkey hurtling to her death, actually she's alive and well in New York City—an ending that will seem needlessly ambiguous to those who haven't read the book.

Benjamin and Miss Black hold the film together; the parents, grotesquely played, get little screen time. Phil Lathrop's camerawork and Michel Legrand's treacly score tend to work against the material, exaggerating the soap opera aspects.

1970. Warner Bros. (Chenault Productions). Technicolor. Panavision. 101 minutes. Richard Benjamin, Karen Black. Produced by Ernest Lehman and Sidney Beckerman. Directed by Ernest Lehman.

PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT is available on VHS from Warner Home Video.

UP IN THE CELLAR

Follow-up to **THREE IN THE ATTIC** lacks same novelty impact, but has enough sexploitation spoof values to draw less sophisticated youth audiences. Best suited for interracial urban markets and drive-ins. Rated R.

UP IN THE CELLAR, the non-sequel follow-up to **THREE IN THE ATTIC**, will be hard put to duplicate the grosses of that earlier AIP comedy. The presence, however, of such saleable aspects as campus unrest, sex elements reminiscent of **THE GRADUATE**, interracial romance and attempted hipness should help put it over with the unsophisticated youth trade and black audience in mixed urban markets and drive-ins.

Writer-director Theodore J. Flicker, whose previous **THE PRESIDENT'S ANALYST** displayed enough satiric bite to make it an erratic underground classic of sorts, shows little of the same sparkle in this lugubrious spoof. The plot, about a rejected student who beds down with the three women in the life of the college president, is exploitable stuff, although on a low level. Performances generally leave much to be desired, as does the color processing and the quality of the New Mexico location production. The funnier moments are largely due to Larry Hagman's performance as a fatuous college president. Wes Stern is colorless as the college poet dejected over the loss of his scholarship, who appeals in vain to politically ambitious Hagman. David Arkin, a revolutionary hiding behind a façade of wealthy conservatism, persuades the suicidal Stern to jump off a radio tower being dedicated by Hagman. Though the latter saves Stern's life and becomes a hero, the would-be poet determines to wreck Hagman's career by seducing his astrology-nut wife (Joan Collins), his black mistress (Judy Pace) and his neurotic daughter (Nira Barab), with whom he falls in love. Such japes as substituting nude film of Miss Barab for the print of **THE SOUND OF MUSIC** to be run at her father's decency rally only serve to turn public sympathy Hagman's way. At the conclusion, Stern drives off with Miss Collins and Miss Barab, while Hagman gets Miss Pace and, presumably, a seat in the Senate.

The characters and situations are given heavy-handed treatment (the decency delegates sing

"Censor Censor Hallelujah") and the presence of tanks and soldiers on campus shooting down black militants is relegated to background-joke status.

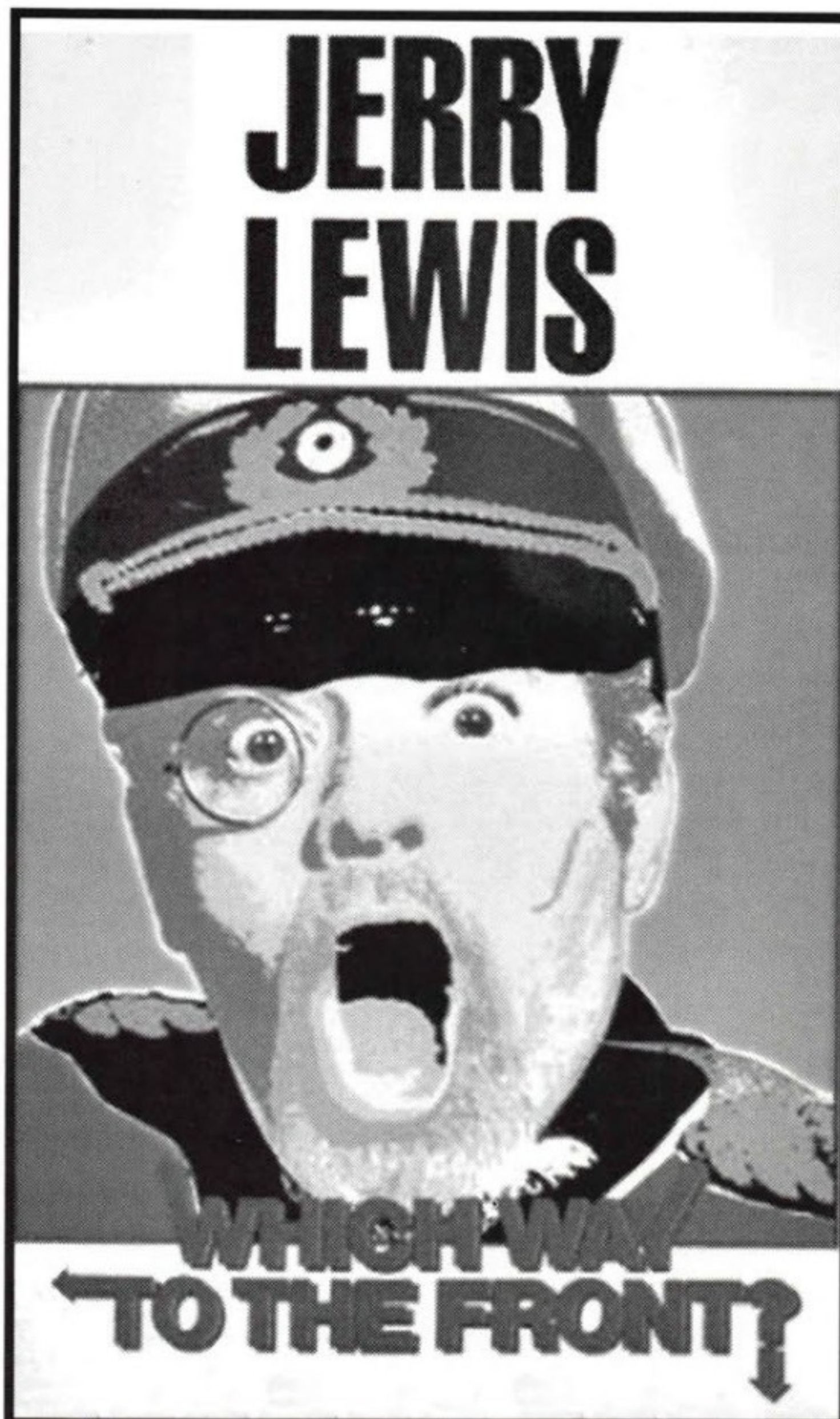
1970. American International. Movielab Color. 94 minutes. Wes Stern. Joan Collins, Larry Hagman. Produced by Samuel Z. Arkoff and James H. Nicholson. Directed by Theodore J. Flicker.

WHICH WAY TO THE FRONT?

Jerry Lewis goes to war. Weak, idiotic comedy will disappoint even his devoted fans. Sub-standard dualler for family trades has only the star's name going for it. Rated G.

A private army of 4-F misfits led by Jerry Lewis stage their own invasion behind German lines in **WHICH WAY TO THE FRONT?**, the producer-director-star's 40th picture, and one of his weakest. This soporific amalgam of deadly tedium and screaming hysteria will have rough going in all but the most undemanding and unsophisticated family markets. It sorely lacks an essential ingredient: comic relief. The Warner Bros. release should attract the Lewis fans on neighborhood and drive-in duallers, but even they will be put off by the flat pacing, lifeless performances, endless talk and poverty of humor; there is hardly enough physical movement to keep the kids in their seats.


Screenwriters Gerald Gardner and Dee Caruso (working from a story by either themselves and Dick Miller or by Les Colodny, Richard Bakalyan and Miller, depending on which credit source you believe) have fashioned an entirely mirthless script which has patriotic millionaire Lewis and army reject friends Jan Murray, Steve Franken, Dack Rambo, John Wood and Willie Davis bluffing the Army into enabling them to slip behind enemy lines in Nazi uniforms. Lewis captures and replaces a Field Marshall who looks like him and spends the rest of the picture strutting about, making faces and shrilly screeching such knee-slappers as "Achtung!" at the top of his lungs. He orders the German army into retreat and becomes involved in a plot to assassinate Hitler (Sidney Miller). In a scene that makes **THE PRODUCERS'** production of "Springtime For Hitler" look good, the prancing *Fuhrer* admits to Lewis that Eva bugs him sometimes, but that he should come over to Berchesgarten for some great matzoh ball soup and "knishes fit for a



dictator." The bomb goes off, but Lewis escapes, only to be captured and imprisoned with his friends by Allied forces. Later they turn up sporting huge caricaturing buck teeth and squinty eyes at Japanese High Command.

Such players as Robert Middleton, Harold J. Stone, Kaye Ballard, Paul Winchell, Joe Besser, Gary Crosby, Kethleen Freeman, Neil Hamilton and Richard Loo are wasted in do-nothing cameo walk-ons. Lewis's direction could be charitably described as misdirected. When stuck for a transition, he inserts swish-pans and punctuates every sequence with a pointless freeze frame. Sonny Burke's music sounds left over from an old Terrytoon, while W. Wallace Kelley's photography is dull two-shot stuff.

1970. Warner Bros. (A Jerry Lewis Films Production). Technicolor. 96 minutes. Jerry Lewis. Produced and directed by Jerry Lewis.

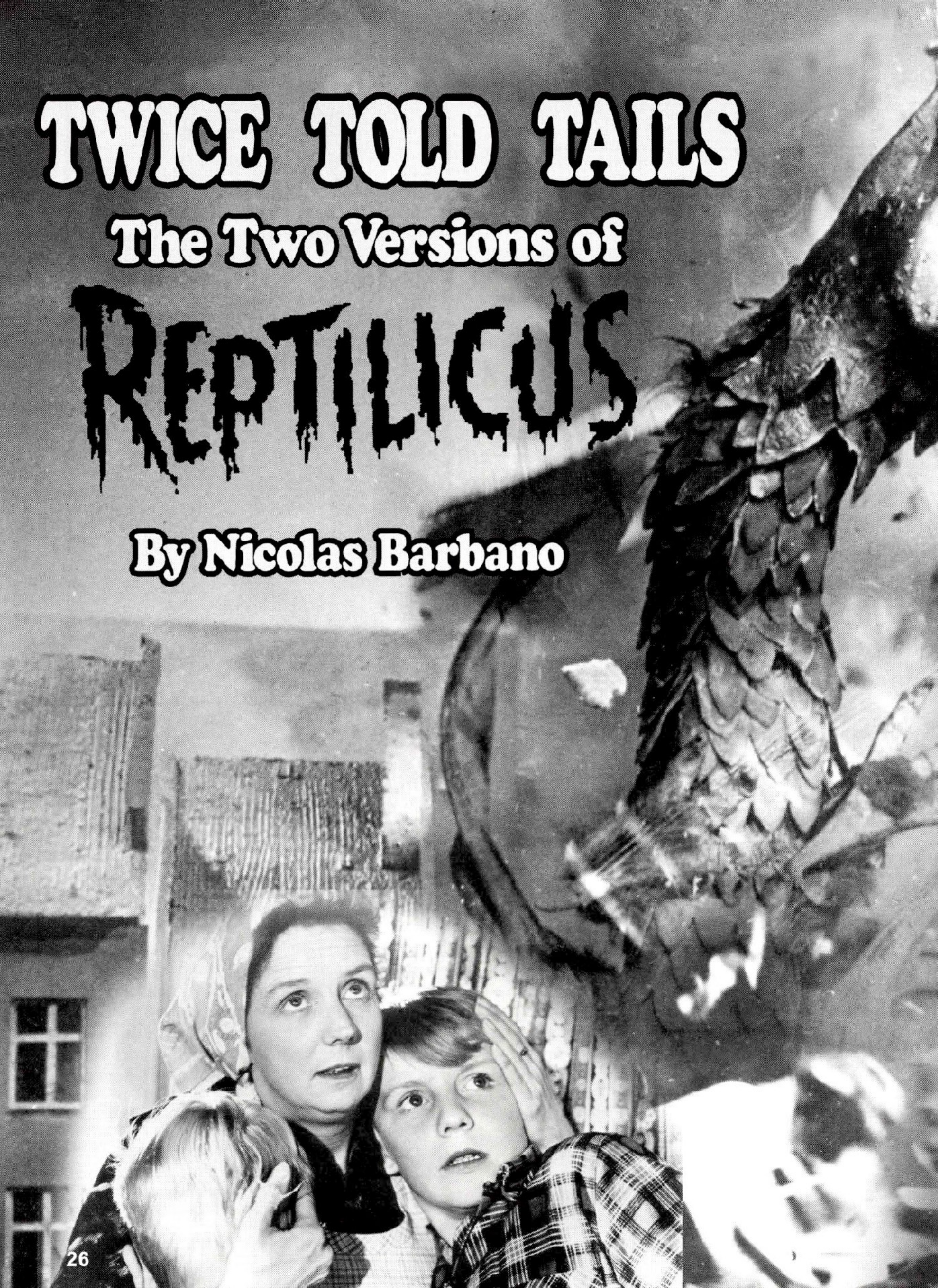
WHICH WAY TO THE FRONT? is available on VHS from Warner Home Video. And yes, the source story writer is *that* Dick Miller! 

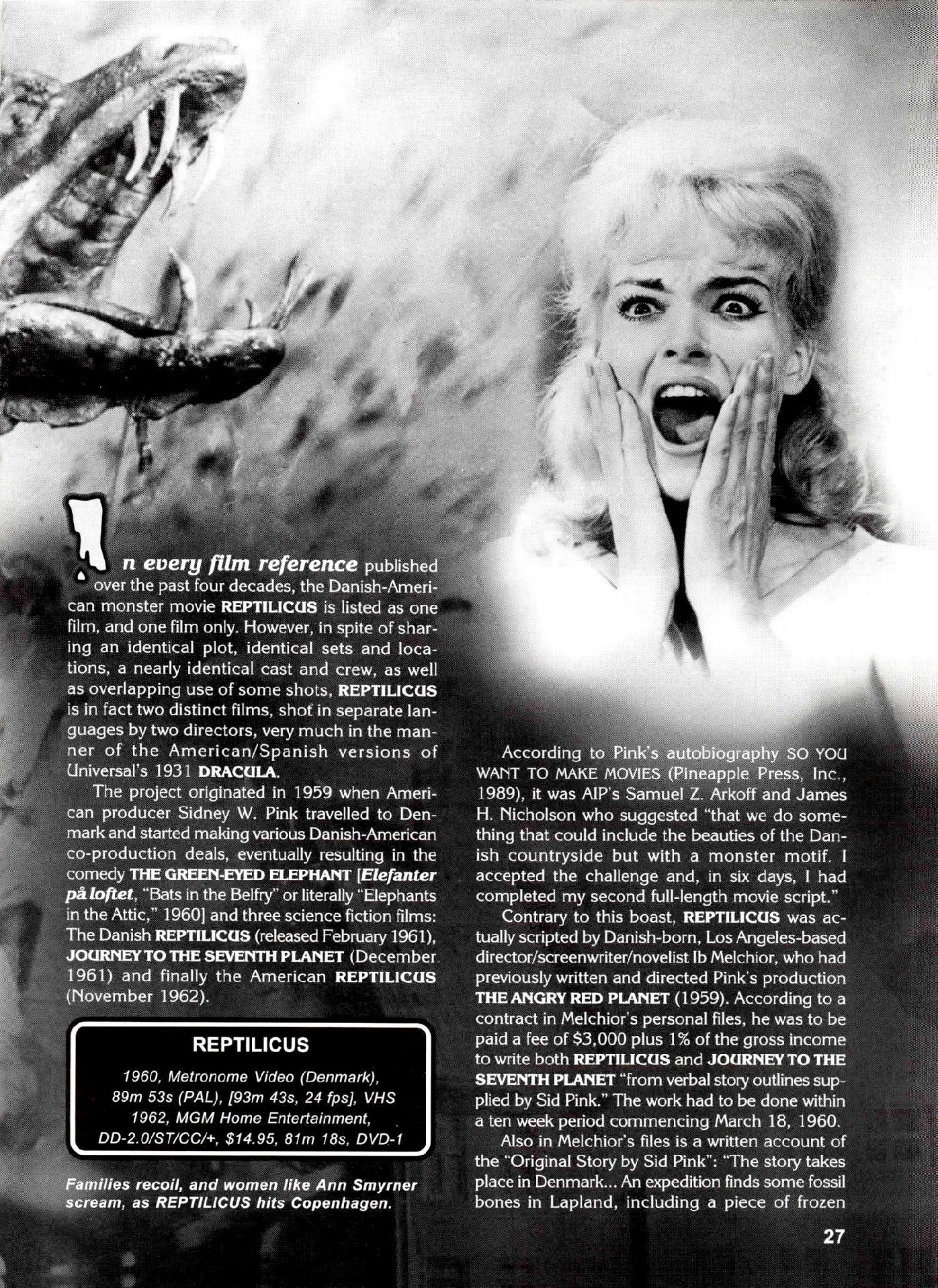
TWICE TOLD TAILS

The Two Versions of

REPTILICUS

By Nicolas Barbano





In every film reference published over the past four decades, the Danish-American monster movie **REPTILICUS** is listed as one film, and one film only. However, in spite of sharing an identical plot, identical sets and locations, a nearly identical cast and crew, as well as overlapping use of some shots, **REPTILICUS** is in fact two distinct films, shot in separate languages by two directors, very much in the manner of the American/Spanish versions of Universal's 1931 **DRACULA**.

The project originated in 1959 when American producer Sidney W. Pink travelled to Denmark and started making various Danish-American co-production deals, eventually resulting in the comedy **THE GREEN-EYED ELEPHANT** [*Elefanter på loftet*, "Bats in the Belfry" or literally "Elephants in the Attic," 1960] and three science fiction films: The Danish **REPTILICUS** (released February 1961), **JOURNEY TO THE SEVENTH PLANET** (December 1961) and finally the American **REPTILICUS** (November 1962).

REPTILICUS

1960, Metronome Video (Denmark),
89m 53s (PAL), [93m 43s, 24 fps], VHS

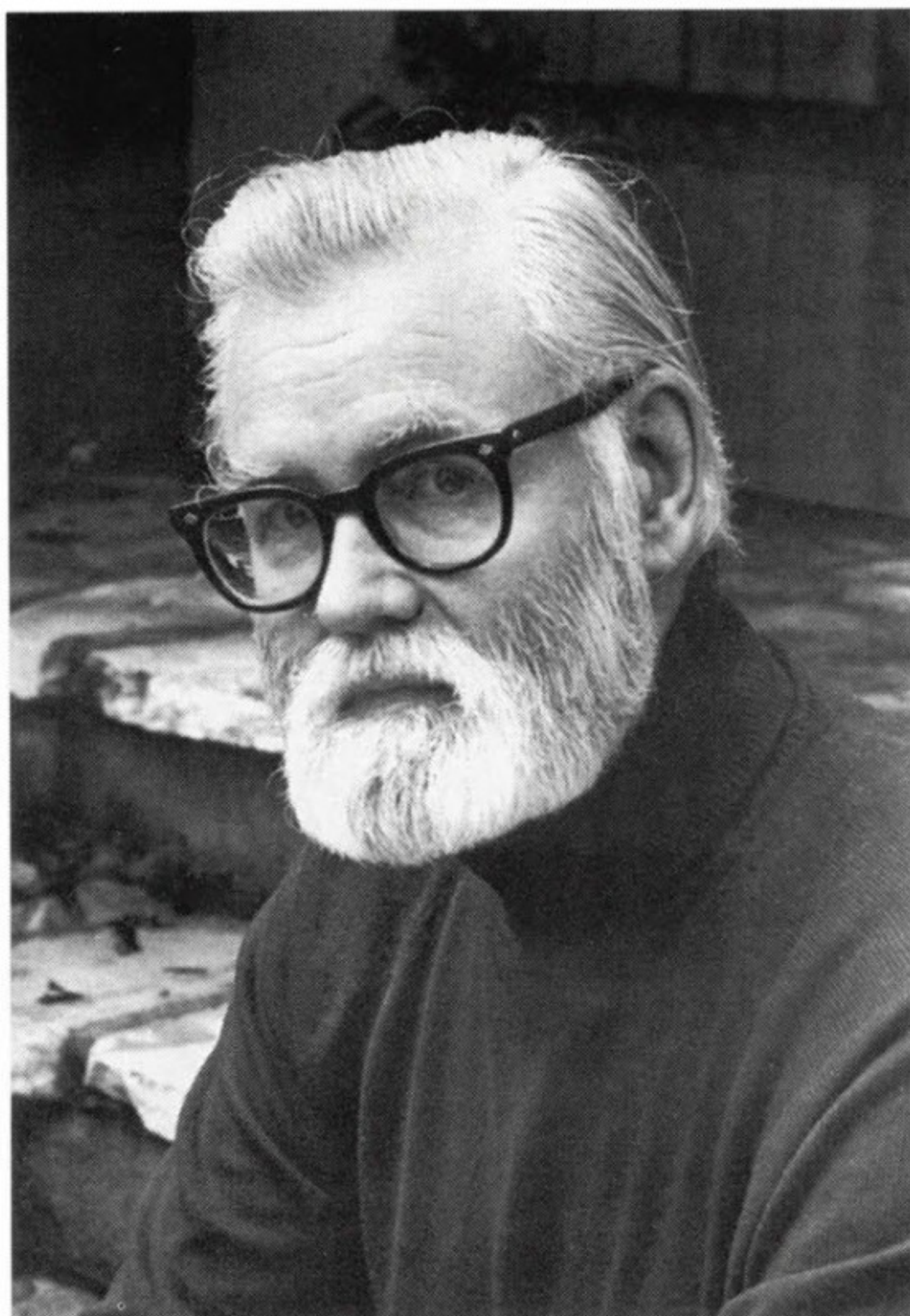
1962, MGM Home Entertainment,
DD-2.0/ST/CC/+, \$14.95, 81m 18s, DVD-1

Families recoil, and women like Ann Smyrner scream, as **REPTILICUS** hits Copenhagen.

According to Pink's autobiography **SO YOU WANT TO MAKE MOVIES** (Pineapple Press, Inc., 1989), it was AIP's Samuel Z. Arkoff and James H. Nicholson who suggested "that we do something that could include the beauties of the Danish countryside but with a monster motif. I accepted the challenge and, in six days, I had completed my second full-length movie script."

Contrary to this boast, **REPTILICUS** was actually scripted by Danish-born, Los Angeles-based director/screenwriter/novelist Ib Melchior, who had previously written and directed Pink's production **THE ANGRY RED PLANET** (1959). According to a contract in Melchior's personal files, he was to be paid a fee of \$3,000 plus 1% of the gross income to write both **REPTILICUS** and **JOURNEY TO THE SEVENTH PLANET** "from verbal story outlines supplied by Sid Pink." The work had to be done within a ten week period commencing March 18, 1960.

Also in Melchior's files is a written account of the "Original Story by Sid Pink": "The story takes place in Denmark... An expedition finds some fossil bones in Lapland, including a piece of frozen



Author Ib J. Melchior—the father of *REPTILICUS*.

tissue, the tip of the animal's tail. The find is brought to Denmark, where the frozen piece grows into a whole monster with a serpent's body and a bat's head, and begins to destroy the city. A United Nations General is put in charge of destroying the monster. There is a romantic interest between him and another U.N. representative, as well as between two of the Danish characters. The creature is eventually killed."

Melchior says that the above synopsis was based on an AIP story conference in which he took part, and that the film's regenerating monster was really his own idea. Certainly, Pink's claim to have written the screenplay (he also claimed to have scripted *JOURNEY TO THE SEVENTH PLANET*) and to have conceived scenes like the Copenhagen bridge disaster conflicts with Melchior's 18-page *REPTILICUS* treatment, dated April 4, 1960: an exciting and tightly plotted story, the structure, characters and incidents of which all made their way to the screen. It seems likely that Pink later did a rewrite, but most of *REPTILICUS* originated with Melchior.

Incidentally, it is interesting to note that Melchior had previously worked on *GIGANTIS THE FIRE MONSTER*, the 1959 American version of

Gojira no gyakushu (1955), a sequel to *Gojira* [US: *GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS!*, 1954], which in turn was inspired by Ray Harryhausen's *THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS* (1953). In a parallel evolution, Melchior's *REPTILICUS* screenplay is similar to *THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS*, especially in its focus on scientists and soldiers teaming up to defeat a defrosted, prehistoric giant that can't be blown to bits (due to either germs or regeneration), but must be killed with a difficult point blank shot (using either radioactive or poisonous ammunition). Also, the Danish *REPTILICUS* poster is a dead ringer for the American *THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS* poster.

The design of the monster itself, usually credited to Danish director and animator Bent Barfod (though one early newspaper item names architect Orla Høyer as the designer), could be inspired by a creature appearing in Carl Barks' 1950 Donald Duck comic *NO SUCH VARMINT*, issued in Denmark in 1955 as *ANDERS AND OG SOSLANGEN*.

It can't be stressed enough how unusual *REPTILICUS* is in Danish cinema. Denmark simply has no tradition for genre movies. The few well-known genre films associated with Danish directors—Benjamin Christensen's *Häxan* [US: *WITCHCRAFT THROUGH THE AGES*, 1922] or Carl Dreyer's *VAMPYR* (1932)—were not Danish productions. For nearly a full century, there were no such things as Danish vampire, werewolf, alien invasion or mad scientist films, and even the best foreign genre films were often ignored by local distributors. *KING KONG* was not released in Denmark until 1959; almost none of the early, classic Hammer horrors were imported; and *STAR TREK* didn't play on Danish television until the 1990s.

In the 1980s, home video started to inspire a new generation of filmmakers, but even so, the Danish Film Institute has maintained a Stalinistic grip on Danish production, rarely allowing anything but dramas and comedies to be made. Apart from no-budget amateur productions, Lars von Trier's Zentropa and its associated companies has emerged as the only breeding ground for unshackled imagination and sense of wonder in Danish cinema.

Though Sid Pink lined up some of the most seasoned craftsmen of Danish cinema to make *REPTILICUS*, they simply didn't have a clue how to approach it—with the notable exception of composer Sven Gyldmark, the Danish Max Steiner, who was always spot-on and rarely less than brilliant.

Even the term “science fiction” was not clearly understood by Danes, which became embarrassingly clear when **REPTILICUS** was released as “The first Danish science fiction (fantasy) epic”!

REPTILICUS was shot in the summer of 1960, in cooperation with one of Denmark’s biggest film companies, Saga Studio, which specialized in comedies, typically directed by Poul Bang and starring Dirch Passer. In what must be one of the most amazing con jobs in cinema history, Pink somehow convinced an awful lot of people—from the Danish press to the Danish government—that his low-budget monster-on-the-loose-flick was a huge, glamorous prestige production. By appealing to national pride and misperceived notions of the film’s “international” status, Pink was allowed to stage huge mass scenes in central Copenhagen. Enthusiastic newspaper coverage documented how Pink directed thousands of unpaid extras to run through the streets in “panic,” at one point using pittance-paid amateurs to enact dangerous stunt falls off a bridge. Pink also secured the cooperation of the Danish military, which happily supplied a small army of men, guns and vehicles, including armored tanks and huge battle ships, not to mention tons of ammunition, all totally free of charge.

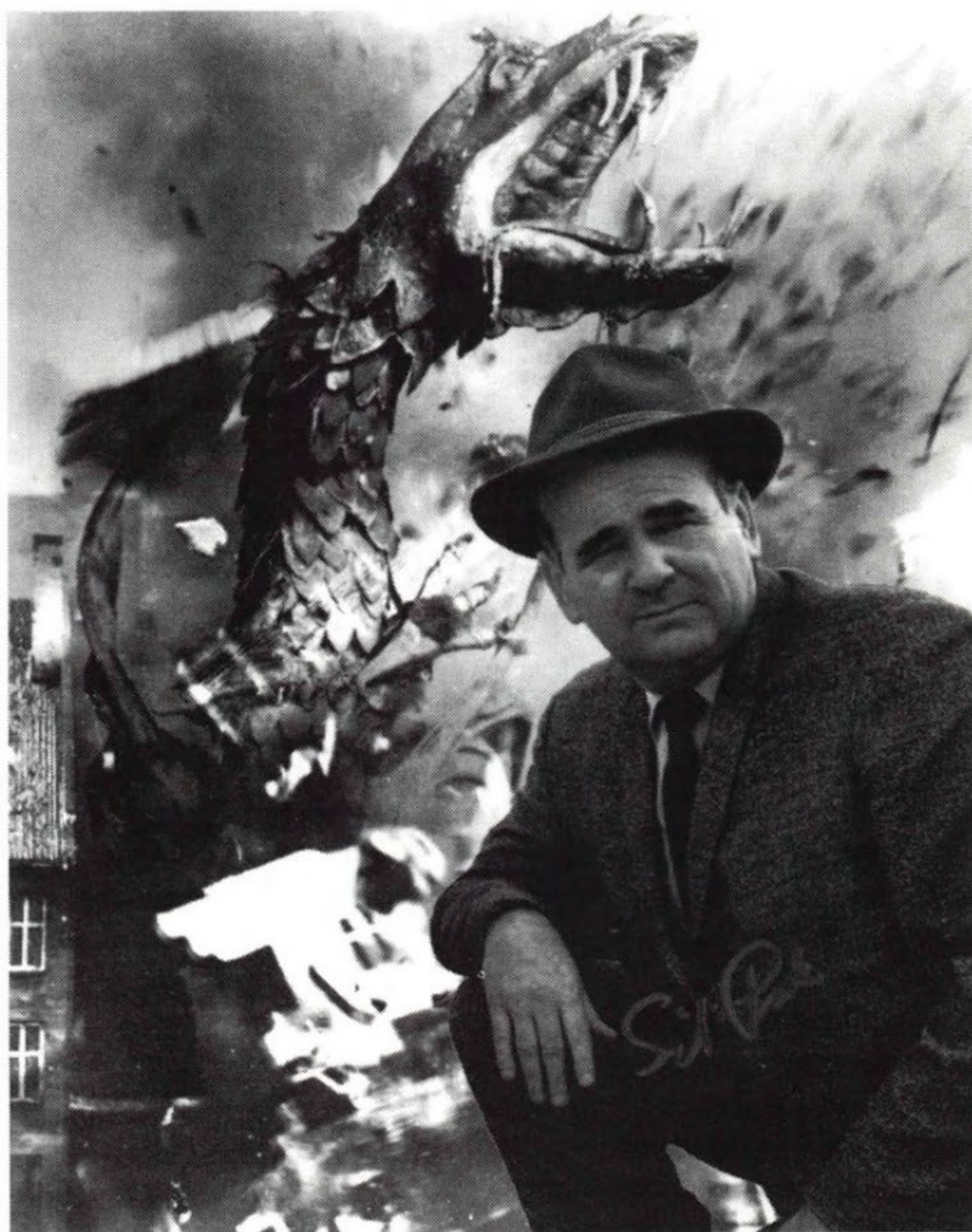
In exchange for free use of the complete studio facilities of Saga, Pink was obliged to supply a Danish-language version of the film for distribution in Denmark. Pink decided that all the dialogue scenes in **REPTILICUS** had to be shot twice, in Danish and English respectively.

“Two complete versions of the same movie? It had never been done before!” brags Pink in his autobiography. (It is often hard to tell if he is dishonestly self-congratulatory or merely ill-informed.) Saga chose their predictable and experienced comedy-director Poul Bang (1905-67) to prepare the Danish version of Melchior’s English-language screenplay, as well as to supervise the production and direct all the Danish dialogue scenes, while the remainder of the production marked the directorial debut of Sidney Pink.

In his autobiography, Pink good-naturedly stated that due to what he

terms “stupidity, ignorance and foolishness” he “made every mistake in the book and then some.” This included his peculiar decision that each scene would first be directed by himself, after which Bang would shoot the same scene again, re-directing the actors while at times changing the camera-setup and lighting to fit his own taste. Pink readily admitted that “confusion reigned supreme.” Regardless, almost every time the camera placement and editing differs between the two films, Pink emerges as a better filmmaker than Poul Bang. Pink’s camera tends to be part of the drama, while Bang’s camera is a distant, bored observer, typical of Danish cinema at that time.

Comparing Metronome Video’s Danish VHS tape with the American DVD from MGM’s “Midnite Movies” series yields quite a number of variations, starting with the language/dialogue and the two director’s individual staging choices. However, the differences of the two versions go much further, since both films underwent changes following their initial completion.



Producer Sid Pink, who passed away last October after a long illness.



Svend (Bent Mejding, center) finds warm flesh in the threads of a mining drill in the opening scene.

According to Ib Melchior, upon watching Pink's version of the film in February 1961, AIP was horrified and deemed it unreleasable. It was shelved for almost two years. In order to realize the film's maximum potential, a number of changes were eventually agreed upon, and on August 17, 1962, AIP handed this assignment over to Melchior (representing Sid Pink) and Anthony Carras (representing AIP), with Melchior in charge of the work.

The changes, carried out in August-October 1962, included recutting the film, creating new special effects scenes and dubbing the voices. Looping took place October 15-22. Among the voice actors used were Robert Cornthwaite, J. Edward McKinley, Lee Millar, Jim Boles and Janet Waldo, plus Melchior and Carras themselves. In the end, it became a far different film to the one released in Denmark.

These are the most notable differences between the Danish (DV) and American International Pictures (AIP) versions of **REPTILICUS**:

- In both versions, after Svend (Bent Mejding) pulls the bloody flesh from Reptilicus' tail from the threads of the drill, the film's title zooms dramatically out of the blood on his hands. Apart from that, the DV opens with its credits sequence, while the AIP places its credits at the end, in what had become the company's "house style."

- In the AIP, narration is used to introduce both the opening sequence and the following camp-fire scene, drowning out part of the latter scene's dialogue.

- The Lapland prologue is shorter and more dynamic in the AIP.

- The AIP introduces Copenhagen with a pan across its peaceful Town Hall Square. The DV does not bother (or need) to explain where we are.

- Although the music of both versions is attributed to Sven Gyldmark, several scenes are differently scored. For example, in the DV, playful Disney-type music is heard as Professor Martens (Asbjorn Andersen) tours the Aquarium exhibit. (Gyldmark had, in fact, turned down an offer to work for Disney in Hollywood, and his music is featured on some Disney anthologies.) Also, the scene where Mikkelsen (Dirch Passer) examines his cheese sandwich under a microscope uses an instrumental patterned on the "Tilicus" song heard later in the DV. Did Gyldmark record different cues for the two versions? Perhaps not. In the AIP, as Reptilicus escapes into the ocean, the music sounds like the work of Les Baxter, who rescored other 1960s AIP imports, so it's not unthinkable that he rescored parts of the recut **REPTILICUS**, or that Baxter library tracks were utilized.

- In the DV, Unesco's scientific advisor Connie Miller is a Danish woman played by Danish actress Bodil Miller; in the AIP, the character is American, played less frigidly by Marla Behrens. According to Pink, Marla Behrens (whom he calls Marilise Behrens) was a former Miss Germany, an 11th hour casting choice whom he then found could not act, causing him to cut down the part. As dubbed by Athena Lord, however, her performance seems not only adequate, but more likeable than that of Bodil Miller. In the AIP, Bodil Miller can be seen in the press meeting scene, sitting next to Hanne Smyrner (billed as "Ann Smyrner"), who plays Lise Martens.

- The DV needs to explain why the American General Grayson (Carl Ottosen) speaks Danish and he thus has to mention having a Danish mother. In the AIP, he speaks English like everyone else, so all Danish people must have American mothers!

- At times, the film seems designed to attract American tourists to Denmark, and judging from the sentiment expressed in Pink's autobiography ("The Danes are a remarkable and wonderful people"; "I don't mean to sound like a travel agent, but... " etc.), this was probably his objective. For a Danish audience, the film's overly idyllic portrayal of Denmark is downright embarrassing, especially a line that is heard only in the DV, spoken with gravity by a proud Dane (Dr. Dalby, played by Povl Wodilke) to the overzealous Grayson: "Here in Denmark we allow ourselves time to *live*!" Proving this,

the main cast later spend a cozy weekend at Dr. Martens' beach cottage, a sequence also left out of the AIP version.

- In the AIP, just before Birthe Wilke sings "Tivoli Nights," General Grayson and Ms. Miller accompany each other on a long, narrated sightseeing tour of Copenhagen and Tivoli—an unnecessary respite for a Danish audience and thus only glimpsed in the DV.

- The AIP leaves out all references to Lise's interest in Ms. Miller's American dress. With this dialogue missing, Karen's awe seems directed at Miss Miller herself, which may give a false impression of a lesbian disposition.

- The AIP wisely leaves out four appalling love scenes between Svend and Karen Martens (Mimi Heinrich). This teenage part is written as a promiscuous nymphomaniac—but, although Heinrich had been a popular teenage-star in the 1950s and was 23 at the time of filming, she plays Karen incongruously like a pig-tailed twelve year old. When watched by a Danish audience, these scenes, supposedly meant to be cute and romantic, evoke a great deal of laughter.

- The DV has four extra scenes featuring the Aquarium's janitor, Mikkelsen, who is called "Petersen" in the AIP. These scenes are: a silly reaction as he is invited to "have a look around" at the Aquarium; a second encounter with the electric eel; a complete musical sequence where Mikkelsen and a group of children sing about the terrible "Tilicus";

The distinguished Danish actor Carl Ottosen (1918-72, foreground) as Gen. Mark Grayson, a role which he did not expect to become a career highlight.



and a mishap as he is sent to fetch the police, when his bicycle falls apart underneath him. In the DV only, Mikkelsen's arrival at the police station is preceded by a comic glimpse of the Police Captain (Kjeld Petersen, Passer's comedy partner in numerous revues and films) cheating at chess. In the AIP, the Police Captain is one of several roles dubbed by Ib Melchior. Dirch Passer was at the height of his popularity at the time, and early in the production, Saga considered releasing the film in Denmark as ***Dragen og Dirch*** ("The Dragon and Dirch"); it was also marketed on VHS in Denmark at one point as a Dirch Passer film.

- The AIP has many close-up insert shots not found in the DV, such as when skin and bone is peeled off the drill; when Dr. Dalby takes a sample from Reptilicus' tail; when he examines it under his microscope; and when Mikkelsen makes the mistake of examining his cheese sandwich. There are also numerous inserts of Reptilicus in the incubator tank, and dramatic stock footage of thunder and lightning heightens the tension as Dr. Dalby falls asleep in the laboratory—unfortunately followed by a clumsily placed insert of the freezer door swinging open. There are also more inserts of Reptilicus hiding on the ocean floor.

- The editing of the AIP creates a longer, more dramatic build-up to the army's first glimpse of Reptilicus, rising above the horizon, and again before we see him run amok in the streets of Copenhagen.

- In the DV, when Professor Martens uses a tape recorder to record his observations of Reptilicus' growth, he notes with amazement its two bat-like



All Copenhagen is dancing as Birthe Wilke sings the immortal "Tivoli Nights."

wings. Later in the DV, Reptilicus spreads its unflapping wings and flies—accompanied by a silly pennywhistle sound effect! In the AIP, Reptilicus never flies at all, and some of the flying shots are replaced in the cutting continuity by tinted B&W stock footage of capsized ships, supposedly left in the wake of Reptilicus.



This is the time for romancing, so Karen (Mimi Heinrich) and Svend (Bent Mejding) gamely follow through, in the Danish version of REPTILICUS. AIP cut these scenes, but Monarch Press embroidered them to pornographic excess in a paperback novelization.



Beloved Danish comedian Dirch Passer entertains the small fry with a song about "Tillicus"—alas, only in the Danish version.

- Although Reptilicus doesn't fly in the AIP, he has another talent: he pukes a corrosive green slime! This animated effect, which appears nowhere in the Danish version, was optically printed over existing footage of the monster roaring as it looms over various miniature sets.

- In the AIP, Reptilicus lifts a farmer in his mouth and eats him. This looks like crude cut-out animation, but Ib Melchior assures me that it was shot as a bluescreen set-up, with the farmer played by his son, Dirk. We've had a big, silly argument about this. Perhaps the bluescreen shots didn't line-up with the original footage, and someone at the lab just solved the problem quickly and cheaply by manipulating frame-blowups under an animation camera.

- The AIP adds huge flame opticals to the shots of Reptilicus by the Stock Exchange, and smoke in front of the monster as it towers over the Town Hall.

- In the DV, before Grayson allows the women to accompany him to the University lab, Lise and Ms. Miller have to tell him that they are the only ones qualified to mix the drug (huh?), and that, for once, the scientists and military should work together.

- As the drug is prepared at the University lab, the DV uses cutaways to Reptilicus at the Town Hall Square, while the AIP shows him eating Tivoli's Chinese Tower, a popular restaurant.

- The radio announcement, which Grayson hears

in the commando room, ends with defeat in the DV, but is changed to victory in the AIP dub—a somewhat significant cultural difference between the two versions. In both versions, however, Grayson reacts as though crushed by the news!

- The AIP has a closeup of Grayson's point blank bazooka missile hitting Reptilicus in the mouth and exploding.

- In the AIP, following the death of Reptilicus, Professor Martens arrives at the Town Hall Square along with his daughters and Ms. Miller. We then see a montage of the destroyed city, where fires are being put out, and the landmark Dragon Fountain (a well-chosen sculpture of an ox dramatically killing a dragon) comes alive with water. None of this is in the DV.

- In the AIP, as an ominous prelude to the final shot of Reptilicus' severed claw regenerating on the ocean floor, Grayson looks at the dead monster and utters the film's most undeniable line: "It's a good thing that there's no more like him!" The Danish equivalent of this line was removed after the release, more of which later.

After the completion of **REPTILICUS**, Sidney Pink stayed in Denmark to produce and direct **JOURNEY TO THE SEVENTH PLANET**, also shot at Saga Studio. I'm told that Pink never paid Saga, which helped him to make it for deferred

payments. This film was produced in only one version, directed by Pink, who then sent the finished, English-dubbed negative to AIP, where it too was re-edited by Melchior, who replaced some of Bent Barfod's special effects (including one he calls "the chicken wire monster") with Jim Danforth stop motion effects.

According to Saga's manager Flemming John Olsen (with whom I spoke on December 12, 1991), a single print of **REPTILICUS** remained in Denmark, where for years Saga kept sending it out to distributors, hoping to find someone who would release it. One day, the print did not come back, and no one bothered to make a fuss about it. Years later, a few reels resurfaced in a container and (according to Olsen) should have been placed in the custody of Filmaktieselskabet, from where they seem to have disappeared again. When manager Finn Aabye cleaned out Filmaktieselskabet's vault in 1998, selling all features to Metronome and donating all shorts to the Danish Film Museum, there was absolutely no trace of Pink's Tivoli fright.

Today, no known print of **JOURNEY TO THE SEVENTH PLANET**—a film featuring several of Denmark's top actors—exists in Denmark. As of this writing, MGM is preparing to release the film on DVD in America, which gives hope that the original negative and its soundtrack (with the original dubbing and special effects) have been located and restored. Missing in action for the past two decades is Otto Brandenburg's end title song, which has never been included on home video editions and has not been heard since the film's US television broadcasts in the early 1980s.

As befits a regenerating giant, **REPTILICUS** has had an active afterlife. In the US, the film benefitted from great poster art by Reynold Brown, making Bent Barfod's laughable marionette-monster look as it should have looked, and substituting Copenhagen's unimpressive Langebro Bridge



Asbjorn Andersen, Ann Smyrner and Povl Woldilke are stunned to discover that the thawed, severed tail of Reptilicus is regenerating new tissue!

with San Francisco's Golden Gate. Though Melchior never saw a dime of his 1% share of the profits, the film performed well theatrically before moving on to television and home video. It was adapted as a comic magazine from Charlton Publication and as a novelization by Dean Owen from Monarch Publishing. Apparently, Pink sued Monarch for including some "raunchy sex passages" in the paperback.

AIP appears to have also profited by selling some of the film's content to stock footage libraries. The crowd scenes from **REPTILICUS** have turned up in New World Pictures' **THE BEES** (1978)—"Only the cut-in scenes of panicking crowds in the Danish capital are well handled," noted **VARIETY**—and other sci-fi films, while Reptilicus has cameoed in TV-sitcoms like **THE MONKEES**, and one of his

deleted flying scenes showed up in a 1980s television commercial.

In Denmark, **REPTILICUS** at first became a source of great embarrassment for all concerned, scorned and ridiculed by critics and audiences alike. After having seen it, two daily newspapers complained about the army's generous contribution to the film. The military responded that nothing had been staged for Pink's benefit, that he was merely allowed to film an exercise that would have taken place anyway, but this doesn't really wash. The Danish military does not usually conduct bazooka exercises at Copenhagen's Town Hall Square.

At the Danish gala premiere on February 20, 1961, the entire audience howled with laughter in spontaneous agreement with the film's closing line: "At least it's good that something like this can never happen again!" This was a time when film critics saw the film on opening night (like theater critics), so the incident was reported the next day in two major reviews, causing the line (but not the claw) to be eliminated from all Danish prints.

In his review, the highly influential critic and screenwriter Klaus Rifbjerg compared director Poul Bang to the ancient, withered corpses dug up from Danish bogs. At Saga's studio, it was for many years forbidden to even mention the film—whoever said the word "Reptilicus" had to buy a round of beer!

Sid Pink left Denmark and produced many other films through the 1960s. In his wake, it would take almost four decades before another Danish monster movie—*Nattens engel* ("The Angel of Night," 1998)—got made, and it will probably take at least another four decades before anyone again is allowed to unleash a giant monster on Copenhagen.

The stigma of **REPTILICUS** did not adhere to the film's male leads. Bent Mejding, the young engineer, enjoyed considerable success playing blonde young heartthrobs, and matured into a highly celebrated actor and stage director, at one point serving as Development Manager of the Danish Royal Theatre.

Carl Ottosen's performance as the angry General Grayson is initially so over-the-top that *VARIETY* claimed it had "to be seen to be believed." Yet Ottosen was a solid, very popular actor (I'll probably regret saying this, but his performance in the film's last half is actually quite good) and continued to work steadily in films, ending his career on a high note with the TV-series *LIVSENS ONDSKAB* ("Life's Cruelty," 1972). He also wrote and directed a number of comedies, several of which starred Dirch Passer.

Established character actor Asbjørn Andersen (Professor Martens) remained active for nearly two decades after **REPTILICUS**, as did Dirch Passer. Though his films became very bad in the 1970s, Passer could milk any situation for a laugh and retained his position as Denmark's #1 funny-man until his death in 1980.

The women of **REPTILICUS** fared less well. At 23, Mimi Heinrich was decidedly too old for her teenager image. Wisely, she made only a few more films after **REPTILICUS**. The same goes for Bodil Miller, who in the previous decade, had enjoyed a brief career in Hollywood, co-starring in Universal's drama **SCARLET ANGEL** (1952). Marla Behrens, it seems, simply disappeared. The 1950s had established Hanne Smyrner as a star in German and Austrian films, and while **REPTILICUS** and **JOURNEY TO THE SEVENTH PLANET** remain her only Danish credits, she continued her acting career in other European countries, usually billed as "Ann Smyrner." She later returned home to Denmark as a self-confessed witch, then changed to a born-again Christian. Whatever she does, she gets ridiculed in the press as "That girl from **REPTILICUS**!"

Say what you like about **REPTILICUS**; it's certainly a film that people remember. A key to the continued life of both the Danish and the American **REPTILICUS** is that, no matter how incompetent the acting, special effects, dialogue, mixing of genres or whatever, as a whole, the film never ceases to entertain. Today, many Danes regard **REPTILICUS** as an unparalleled Danish cult classic, celebrated with a smile as "the worst film ever made."

Ib Melchior—who went on to write much better films (including 1964's **THE TIME TRAVELERS**, which he also directed) and many successful novels—regrets that today, in his native Denmark, he is known primarily as "the Father of Reptilicus." I have pointed out to Ib that this is no one's fault but his own. He could have let his monster be blown out of existence—as, indeed, was his original intention. His original treatment ends thusly: "Reptilicus has been vanquished... *All* of him can be destroyed—*forever!*" But later, on the bottom of the last page, Melchior added this hand-written note: "See piece in water!" THE END?

Four decades hence, the legend of **REPTILICUS**, if not his claw, continues to grow.

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Captain Scarlet



Reviewed by Shane M. Dallmann

The last, the toughest and (to some) the very best of the Supermarionation extravaganzas from Gerry & Sylvia Anderson (THUNDERBIRDS, STINGRAY, SUPERCAR) was 1967's CAPTAIN SCARLET AND THE MYSTERONS. Mindful of, but never condescending to its youthful audience, this series was conceived as a "war film" told in interplanetary terms, in which a faceless enemy (a mysterious "they" from outer space) constantly seeks to destroy the forces of good (represented by a unified Planet Earth). While the enemy has the ability to perfectly imitate "us," one of their number accidentally becomes our best hope against "them." Elements of paranoia and suspicion, combined with large-scale violence and destruction staged on small-scale sets, suffuse the atmosphere in a series played sufficiently straight to make its relatively rare moments of comic relief stand out considerably. A&E now offers all 32 episodes on DVD, collected under the abbreviated banner CAPTAIN SCARLET.

With "Captain Scarlet" agreed upon as a good name for the hero of such a series, it was decided to name all the men in his organization after various colors. (Was the future creator of **RESERVOIR**

DOGS among the show's young American fans?) Thus, Captain Blue, Lt. Green (in a deliberately multicultural touch, this character is referred to by some with the American pronunciation "lieutenant" and by others with the British "lef-tenant"), Captain Ochre, *et al*, serve under the command of the stern, no-nonsense Colonel White in a floating fortress known as Cloudbase. And the organization's name? Spectrum, of course. While colorful names and groundwork assignments were reserved for the men, female agents were equally important to Spectrum. Known collectively as The Angels, they represent the element of air support, and have similarly complementary names: Destiny, Symphony, Melody, Harmony and

CAPTAIN SCARLET

1967, A&E Home Video, DD-5.1 & DD-2.0/MA/+, \$79.95, approx. 832m, DVD-0

Ever vigilant, Spectrum officers Captain Scarlet and Captain Blue patrol the heavens on the lookout for Mysteron menace.

Rhapsody. Befitting its moniker even further, Spectrum boasts members of all races and nationalities, all representing the forces of good, law and order. Yet the conflict which dominates the series is triggered by an unprovoked act of aggression by Spectrum itself as the story begins.

The year is 2068. A Spectrum ship is patrolling the planet Mars when a city of advanced civilization is discovered. In a rash decision, team leader Captain Black—sensing a threat to the people of Earth—orders its destruction. Spectrum's demolition raid is successful—however, the seemingly ruined city rebuilds itself before the stunned eyes of the Spectrum officers. The disembodied "voice of the Mysterons" is then heard, vowing ceaseless revenge for the assault. Soon, a more devastating demonstration takes place; Black is himself annihilated, only to reappear instantaneously as a perfect duplicate with a Mysteron consciousness. The vengeance trail quickly leads to Earth, and the next Spectrum members to be killed and replaced are Captain Brown and the suave, clean-cut Captain Scarlet (voiced by Hammer veteran Francis Matthews). When the Brown double (transformed into a walking bomb) fails, the Scarlet double is sent to assassinate the "World President," but Spectrum intelligence catches on before his mission can be "executed." Ultimately, it is Scarlet's best friend, Captain Blue, who must save the President by shooting his comrade down from a teetering, towering car-park structure (one of many spectacular miniatures created by Derek Meddings for the series). However, this traumatic incident has some interesting (and largely unexplainable) side effects. Somehow, the bullet that grazes Scarlet's skull causes his original personality to resurface, free of Mysteron control. And the unquestionably fatal injuries sustained in his fall are miraculously healing. Mysteron technology has rendered Captain Scarlet... indestructible!

Creator Gerry Anderson supplies audio commentary on this pilot episode, "The Mysterons," which opens Disc One of A&E's four-disc set. Anderson describes the genesis of the episode, from preparation in December 1966 through the actual filming in January 1967. He discusses his desire to create a more serious, realistic tone in which to display his most ambitious, advanced Supermarionation characters yet; the painstaking, complicated details which extended to props and costumes (such as the tiny microphone which flips down from the caps of Spectrum members when they activate their communicators; his paranoia about visible wires (they're there, especially in this beautifully exacting DVD presentation, but they

quickly fade to the back of the viewer's mind)—and his thoughts about the Japanese broadcast version of this series, which came with a fresh, new credit sequence and a "jolly little song... yuck!"

As with all series episodes, "The Mysterons" is preceded by an eerie title sequence in which the camera explores a foreboding dark alley. An off-screen narrator describes the powers of the Mysterons ("...but first, they must destroy!") before a screeching cat heralds a sudden, blinding flash of light. Our hero, at the end of the alley, is peppered with blasts from a machine gun, but stands tall through the barrage. Raising his gun, he fires a single shot, and his unseen would-be assassin collapses with a dying gasp. The forceful, seven-note drumbeat that denotes each and every scene change throughout the show brings up the name "Captain Scarlet" (the full title of the show appears at the beginning) as the narrator introduces the indestructible man. (A&E's collection preserves this original version of the titles, as opposed to an American alternative that was narration-free, save for the advisory "Captain Scarlet is indestructible. You are not. Remember this: Do not try to imitate him!" at the tail end.) Though not entirely representative of the show's rules (Captain Scarlet is *not* bulletproof—you can shoot him down, but he'll eventually recover), the sequence braces the viewer for the suspense and violence to come.

Beginning with the second episode, the format remains unchanged: the title sequence is followed by a prologue establishing the conflict of the week. The remaining players are then introduced as "the voice of Mysteron" (appropriately, the voices of both Mysteron/Captain Black and Colonel White are supplied by Donald Gray), accompanied by the visual manifestation of two floating circles of light, announces their next step in the ongoing "war of nerves." The final character to be introduced is always "Mysteron Agent Captain Black," who stands ominously in a cemetery, waiting to strike. And strike he does—many an episode begins with Black dispatching an unsuspecting victim (explosions, drownings, shootings and one extreme example in which he backs his car over a helpless mechanic!), allowing the Mysteron circles to commandeer a new body. Upon receiving the traditional warning, it's up to the agents of Spectrum to decipher and thwart the Mysteron plot, using their array of special weapons and vehicles: most notably the SPV (Spectrum Pursuit Vehicle), which is driven backwards and navigated via video monitor; the Saloon Car; and the Angel Interceptors. Success is not always a foregone conclusion—some episodes

actually conclude with a Mysteron victory—and an especially ironic touch has several Spectrum triumphs capped by the heroic sight of Captain Scarlet lying dead in a pile of rubble. (“Are you all right, Captain?” “I will be... I will be...”) Finally, the theme song (only slightly more complicated than that of the BATMAN TV series) plays over a colorful series of comic-book splash panels, depicting Scarlet in a variety of hair-raising predicaments (most of which never take place on the show) in an appropriately exciting end titles sequence.

A&E presents the CAPTAIN SCARLET episodes (approximately 26m each) in their original broadcast order, which was typically reshuffled in State-side broadcast. Disc One continues with “Winged Assassin,” in which Spectrum must protect the Director General of the United Asian Republic from a Mysteron death threat, while Captain Scarlet comes to terms with his new powers. A nuclear device planted somewhere in London spells potential disaster in “Big Ben Strikes Again”—only by figuring out why the famous clock bell apparently chimed 13 times at 12:00 can Scarlet and Blue save the day.

In a plot which could have similarly serviced a sitcom, the two captains attempt to find the proper four-letter code word that will deactivate the “Renegade Rocket” (they start at “A” and

move laboriously through the code book)—it’s only a fluke that allows them both to survive into the next episode.

Far more gripping is “Point 783,” in which the Mysterons seize control of Unitron, a robotic supertank, in an effort to wipe out Earth’s Supreme Commander (a Robert Mitchum-like marionette, which plays a number of different roles as the series progresses).

In “Manhunt,” it seems that Captain Black has mistakenly dosed himself with radioactivity, allowing him to be easily tracked by Spectrum agents. But when Symphony Angel (Sylvia Anderson herself was the primary female voice artist) falls into Black’s clutches, just who has tricked who?

“Operation Time” shows the Mysterons to be appreciative of wordplay—just what is meant by their threat to “kill Time?” And why have the Mysterons duplicated a gifted surgeon? The word games continue with “White as Snow”—in which Colonel White is targeted for Mysteron assassination, forcing him to assume the disguise of “Mr. Snow.”

In addition to the first eight episodes and the Anderson commentary, Disc One offers a text “Introduction” to the series and the first of four photo galleries.

The Angels become the center of attention in “Search and Destroy,” Disc Two’s opening

Colonel White, the head of Spectrum, as he appears in the episode “Manhunt.”





Destiny Angel spreads her wings in "Seek and Destroy."

installment. The death threat delivered by the Mysterons in the opening leads to an impressive dogfight sequence in the finale.

In "Spectrum Strikes Back," a new Mysteron detector and a special anti-Mysteron gun (though we have seen Mysteron agents dispatched with conventional weapons in the past) are unveiled at a secret hideaway cloaked in a game preserve. The need for both quickly arises, and several good guys find themselves in a Bondian deathtrap involving a slowly descending ceiling.

The Arctic Circle supplies the setting for "Avalanche," in which the Mysterons seek to undo the Frost Line Outer Space Defense System with a series of mysterious murders. Meanwhile, Colonel White finds alleged colleague Space General Ward to be nearly as insufferable as the enemy!

A Himalayan observatory housing telescopic equipment capable of photographing Mysteron activity is targeted for destruction in "Shadow of Fear." Typically excellent miniature work highlights this astonishingly downbeat episode, which provides one of the best opportunities to address the show's occasionally controversial use of violence.

No two ways about it: CAPTAIN SCARLET was one of the most violent shows ever offered to a family audience. Explosive destruction was commonplace, while one-on-one brutality frequently left characters battered and bloodied even when

they weren't killed outright—after all, this was a *war* show. But while young viewers were certainly allowed to enjoy the undeniable spectacle, it always came with an appropriate context. War involved far more than pyrotechnic fun, as illustrated here: one's status as a "good guy" didn't guarantee survival, and when the Spectrum agents resorted to matching the brute force dished out by the Mysterons, their motivations were clearly based on sheer necessity as opposed to any sort of glamor (and even then, it didn't always work). Aggression never came without a price—indeed, it was Spectrum that started the war with a needless show of force, as the Mysterons never tired of reminding them. If a "Seek and Destroy" mission made shooting down the "bad guys" look cool, there was always a "Shadow of Fear" to provide the opposite reaction. On an unrelated note, this episode contains an interesting technical gaffe—the voice of the Mysterons is heard without the usual distortion.

The Mysterons next declare their intention to strike "The Heart of New York." With the entire city (incredibly) evacuated, some enterprising crooks take advantage of the situation—and their ill-gotten knowledge of the Spectrum/Mysteron conflict—to make a killing at the Second National Bank. However, the Mysterons couldn't care less which side of the law any Earthling is on... The



Spectrum discovers that a Manhattan bank has been robbed during the enforced evacuation of NYC in "The Heart of New York."

foreboding scenes of Captain Black surveying the metropolitan ghost town were effectively utilized for A&E's DVD menu sequence.

A "Fire at Rig 15" threatens to consume Spectrum's oil supply, thus grounding their fleet of vehicles. To make matters worse, the oil-rig fire expert racing to the scene is quickly replaced by a Mysteron double.

"The Launching" adds to the confusion regarding the world's governmental hierarchy. In previous episodes, we've had a "World President" and an "Earth Supreme Commander," and now there's also an American "President Roberts." But is he truly the "President Roberts" the Mysterons promise to destroy within 12 hours as the story begins? Bureaucratic questions notwithstanding, this is a particularly entertaining episode with a most satisfying last-second cliffhanger resolution. Less satisfying, however, is the new theme song which debuts at the end of this episode and stays for the remainder of the series. "Captain Scarlet... he's the one who knows the Mysteron game... and things they plan..." Awkward lyrics such as these, sung by "The Spectrum," are force-fed into an arrangement of the original theme music, draining the end titles of much of their original punch.

Wrapping up Disc Two is "Lunarville 7," in which a Moon-based Earth colony announces a

truce with the Mysterons and a severing of earthly ties. An understandably suspicious Spectrum team investigates, enjoying some low-gravity ambulation before exposing the latest Mysteron threat. Supplemental features here include a Gerry Anderson biography/filmography, selected character bios, another photo gallery and a selection of production stills.

Disc Three opens with "The Trap," an imaginative change of pace in which Scarlet, investigating the latest Mysteron sabotage (the loss of contact with a planeload of VIPs is passed off as a "lightning" strike), travels to Scotland to check out the secret conference site at Glen Garry Castle—which is tricked-out with such traditional spooky elements as a painting with cut-out eye-holes (real human eyes are used for the closeup effect). Despite his indestructibility, Captain Scarlet doesn't have super strength—he soon finds himself chained in the castle dungeon while the Mysteron plot thickens.

Perhaps even more gimmicky is "Model Spy," in which several Spectrum agents must pose as models in the fashion show of French designer André Verdain (also a Spectrum member) in order to thwart the Mysterons once again. While the episode has its silly moments, it contains two noteworthy elements: the identification of

Captains Scarlet and Blue by their real names (Paul Metcalf and Adam Swenson, respectively), and a brutal highpoint in which an unconscious body is heaved out of a moving car.

"Dangerous Rendezvous" opens with a Mysteron threat against Cloudbase itself, but provides Spectrum with a previously unavailable opportunity to communicate with their foes: Colonel White even goes so far as to issue a full apology for Captain Black's unprovoked attack in the first episode (flashbacks are used here, partially for cost-cutting reasons, but also to bring any new viewers up to date with the premise). Surprisingly, the Mysterons agree to a one-on-one meeting—but of course, the Spectrum representative has to be Captain Scarlet... The indestructible man abruptly reveals some serious drinking and gambling problems in the following episode, leading to his abrupt dismissal from Spectrum by Colonel White. Is Scarlet truly that far gone, or might he be on "Special Assignment?"

A lethal virus known as XK-14 may be unleashed on humanity by the Mysterons unless Spectrum can figure out what they mean by the "Place of Angels." In the spirit of equal opportunity, a female character is afforded one of the

series' more show-stopping demises by the end of the story.

"Crater 101," a follow-up to Disc Two's "Lunarville 7," reveals another Mysteron moonbase, which Scarlet, Blue and Green target for a vehicular assault.

The assassination of one Dr. Summers is only one of the cold-blooded killings in "Expo 2068," which involves a Mysteron plot to detonate a nuclear device during the eponymous event. This is another standout episode—and not just from a dramatic standpoint. While the wooden crate hiding the weapon may not rank as one of the most impressive miniatures ever created for the series, the sequence in which the characters must saw through it, as it dangles from a helicopter, reveals an amazing level of concentration, skill and dexterity behind the camera—all too easy to take for granted as one watches the episode.

As Disc Three concludes, the Mysterons announce that one of Spectrum's agents is a "Traitor." Naturally, suspicion falls on the agent who was formerly a pawn of the Mysterons. More flashback footage from the pilot episode is used as Captain Blue narrates Captain Scarlet's origin—and naturally, the mystery villain doesn't turn out

Spectrum assigns Captain Scarlet to represent them in a one-on-one meeting with the Mysterons in "Deadly Rendezvous."





Colonel White mans the battle stations as the Mysterons stage a surprise "Attack on Cloudbase."

to be Scarlet or any of the regulars. Additional character bios, another photo gallery and a selection of Spectrum ID cards fill out the third disc's supplemental section.

The fourth and final disc starts off with "Flight 104," in which a couple of persistent press photographers dog Scarlet and Blue as they escort the Mysteron-threatened Dr. Conrad (scientific advisor to the World President) on a perilous trip to Geneva. The distractions allow the Mysterons to trap the entire (somewhat clueless) group on an otherwise-empty, remote controlled aircraft.

In "Noose of Ice," the action centers around a North Pole base guarding a valuable Tritonium mine that is vital to the manufacturing of Spectrum's rocket fuel. By sabotaging the generators that keep the surrounding waters from freezing, the Mysterons threaten the base with slow, crushing destruction. While again superlative in the miniatures department, the episode throws a new twist into the show's rules (and rather late in the game): it's suddenly suggested that only high voltage can kill this story's Mysteron operative... and that it can kill Captain Scarlet, too.

"Codename Europa" involves a "triumverate of Europe" consisting of three World Ministers—and a triple-assassination plot to match. Cloak and dagger trickery is the order of the day in an episode in which the cleverest of spies can still fall for the oldest tricks in the book.

There are plenty of character-breaking moments in "Flight to Atlantica," but only thanks to an unbelievably boneheaded blunder on the part of our hero. A case of special (non-alcoholic) champagne arrives at Cloudbase, courtesy of an anonymous "well-wisher" congratulating Spectrum on the occasion of its anniversary. Naturally, Scarlet throws an unauthorized party and serves the champagne to just about everybody (an accident prevents him from getting any himself) before the by-the-book Colonel White angrily calls a halt to the festivities. Surprise, surprise: an easily detectable (after the fact, of course) Mysteron drug was in the bubbly, and everyone who ingested it has become a careless, lazy goof-off. This is especially bad news for the World Navy Complex, as Captain Blue is currently at the controls of one of

its weapons-bearing craft. Astonishingly, Captain Scarlet—the man who let it all happen—is still treated as a hero at the fadeout!

Less amusing but far more intelligent is “Treble Cross,” in which a World Air Force test pilot is duplicated by the Mysterons for typically nefarious purposes. However, in this instance, the difference between clinical death and brain death allows doctors to revive the genuine article, and the men of Spectrum must make sure that he’s at the right place at the right time.

“Attack on Cloudbase” begins ominously as an accident strands an injured Symphony Angel in the desert. Subsequently, the voice of the Mysterons declares that Cloudbase is to be destroyed once and for all—and for the first time, actual Mysteron spacecraft appear on Earth to carry out the threat. The drama builds to a crescendo as Spectrum fights valiantly (but in vain) against the aggressors: when the point of no return is reached, only one resolution is possible (though I wouldn’t dream of giving it away). Gerry Anderson returns to provide audio commentary on this, one of the last series episodes to be produced. He’s quite fond of the plot device used here, though he acknowledges that many viewers find it frustrating, and he made sure that “Attack on Cloudbase” received special attention. An original score was composed for this outing (after the first few episodes, the soundtracks mainly consisted of recycled cues), and Tony Barwick’s script contained plenty of (to use Anderson’s term) “Tony Barwick-isms,” complementing Anderson’s concept of the episode as a black comedy. Anderson also uses the track’s running time to further point out some subtle details visible throughout the series, such as the different facial expressions of the characters, the occasional appearance of five-o’clock-shadow on the men, etc., points out director Alan Perry as Scarlet’s “hand” double, and reaffirms his awareness of the show’s younger viewers by demonstrating how he always tried to juxtapose frightening violence with eventual reassurance.

By all rights, “Attack on Cloudbase” should have been saved as a series finale—but, as it happened, two lesser installments remained. “The Inquisition” pits Captain Blue against an interrogator who questions his identity as a Spectrum member. While the use of flashback footage in previous episodes had a claim to validity, this is little more than a “clip show” that replays lengthy segments of “Crater 101” and “The Trap” in Blue’s defense. And “Inferno” takes Scarlet and Blue to South America and an ancient Aztec temple.

Somewhere in the structure lies a homing device that will cause a Mysteron-controlled spacecraft to crash into it, causing the destruction of a much-needed desalination plant in the vicinity. When the efforts of the two agents fail to uncover the device, a frantic last-minute Spectrum bombardment reduces the archeological treasure to rubble—all for naught. You can practically hear the Mysterons laughing in the background as Captain Scarlet vows that the fight will continue. To date, however, it hasn’t.

Disc Four’s supplements include the last of the photo galleries and production stills, and a detailed look at the different vehicles used throughout the series. A DVD-ROM-only option promises “interactive vehicle diagrams,” as well.

A few questionable episodes scarcely makes any sort of case against CAPTAIN SCARLET AND THE MYSTERONS as a whole. This visionary series boasts equal accomplishments in action/adventure, thoughtful drama and eye-popping effects work. Visually, the show has been well-served by this digitally-remastered A&E collection. Aside from a slight shimmer during Captain Black’s “cemetery” introduction and a few similarly dark moments, the image appears quite unimpaired, with bright, vibrant colors constantly on display. With the exception of the two episodes that offer Anderson’s commentary, Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround tracks are offered throughout, as well—the effect, though not earth-shaking, is enjoyable, but the original mono tracks (in fine Dolby 2.0) have been kept available for a more authentic CAPTAIN SCARLET experience. Each of the 32 episodes has been given six chapters and must be accessed separately—there is no “play all” option.

While A&E is to be commended for making such a definitive set available, our recommendation must come with one caveat. When this set first hit stores, many purchasers were confronted with a considerable defect: the menu screens would not allow access to either the first episode or the last episode on each of the first three discs. Pressing “Stop” and “Play” after the menu screen had loaded would cause the first episode to appear, taking care of “The Mysterons,” “Seek and Destroy” and “The Trap,” but still leaving “White as Snow,” “Lunarville 7” and “Traitor” completely inaccessible. In addition, “The Mysterons” would only play with the Gerry Anderson commentary track on some players. Disc Four, on the other hand, was fine throughout. A&E was made aware of the defect, and at the time of this writing stood ready to replace any CAPTAIN SCARLET sets so affected.



DVDs



*One of Amicus' favorite beasties, a crawling hand, terrorizes the house of Fengriffen in
—AND NOW THE SCREAMING STARTS!*

—AND NOW THE SCREAMING STARTS!

1972, Image Entertainment,
DD-2.0/MA/LB/+, OOP,
90m 7s, DVD-0

By Shane M. Dallmann

The choppy Stateside video history of this rare non-anthology horror feature from Amicus Productions reaches a satisfying conclusion on this Image Entertainment "Euroshock Collection" DVD. —AND NOW THE SCREAMING STARTS! (as the onscreen title would punctuate it) was previously released on such US video labels as Nostalgia Merchant (a division of the defunct Media Home Entertainment) and

Prism in its television version (with some mild gore and a tame bare-backside shot trimmed). Within the past couple of years, the uncut version was resurrected for cable TV playdates but Image's DVD (presented by TV Matters, who previously supplied their master for **ASYLUM**, reviewed VW 64:6) marks the film's wide-screen video debut.

Roger Marshall scripted this adaptation of David Case's novella FENGRIFFEN, named for the family of Charles (Ian Ogilvy), who has brought his new bride Catherine (Stephanie Beacham) home to his ancestral estate. Unbeknownst to Catherine,

Charles has brought her to flaunt his disbelief in a curse placed on his family generations earlier, as a result of a vicious crime perpetrated by ancestor Henry Fengriffen (Herbert Lom). But almost immediately upon moving in, Catherine is beset by spectral visitations—including a crawling severed hand and a phantom that attacks her in her own bed (the rape is suggested, not depicted). Despite the preventative efforts of Charles, and the mysterious deaths of servants and associates that get too close to the truth, Catherine gradually learns more about the history of the family she has married into, and develops a morbid certainty

that her unborn child doesn't belong to Charles—or to any *living* person. Meanwhile, the defiant Charles insists that a local woodcutter (Geoffrey Whitehead) with a distinctive, telling birthmark is personally responsible for Catherine's ordeal; and family doctor Whittle (Patrick Magee) summons journeyman psychiatrist Dr. Pope (top-billed Peter Cushing) to set her mind at ease. A vivid flashback tells the tale behind the tale, setting the stage for a seemingly inevitable conclusion.

Director Roy Ward Baker and set designer Tony Curtis got more than was seemingly possible from the meager budget provided by Amicus producers Max J. Rosenberg and Milton Subotsky. The Oakley Court manor house provided a splendid, detail-rich period location in which to stage an atmospheric ghost story, and the exceptionally strong cast was more than up to the task. It may seem unfair that marquee value gave three supporting players (Cushing, Lom and Magee) billing over the two actual leads, but their contributions remain solid and essential: Lom, of course, gets a sequence of his own (the flashback), which he dominates with a potent display of humorless evil comparable to Vincent Price's Matthew Hopkins in **WITCHFINDER GENERAL** [US: **THE CONQUEROR WORM**, 1968], which also starred Ogilvy, or his own witchfinding role in 1970's **MARK OF THE DEVIL**. The resemblance of this scene, which begins in revelry and ends in bloodshed, to the ancestral legend of THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES is no accident; nor is the echo of **REBECCA** in Catherine's opening narration, heard as she approaches the fateful estate: the deliberate *homages* are quite

appropriate for this story. Less comfortably-placed (to the ultimate harm of the film) are the overtly supernatural intrusions (when withholding specific evidence of a curse would have resulted in a doubly effective finale). The crawling hand (which remains the centerpiece of the film's promotional material to this day, as the DVD packaging demonstrates), was not derived from Case's original work and can't seem to decide if it exists as a corporeal entity (bursting through paintings, secretly trailing characters *before* they have any reason to think it's around) or as a "spirit" hand that appears, ghostlike, over the image as various supporting characters (including **MR. SARDONICUS'** Guy Rolfe as a family lawyer) meet their untimely ends. An eyeless, one-handed phantom, though effective, is similarly problematic: the dead character it might be isn't eyeless, and the (eventually) eyeless character it might be isn't dead yet! The producers' insistence on subtlety extended only to the main characters—therefore, the significance of the ghostly visit to Catherine's bed could easily be missed, while the open, obvious acts of rape and mutilation in the flashback still eliminate the film from most "family viewing" lists (the Cinerama release carried an MPAA "R" rating). Flawed as it may be, the cast and the production values demand that it be seen at least once.

—**AND NOW THE SCREAMING STARTS!** is offered in a blemish-free 1:85:1 presentation, which offers a sharper, more indulgent look at the Oakley Court interiors than that of previous video incarnations—though even those weren't in nearly as dreadful shape as the 55s theatrical trailer included on the disc. Said trailer, which

predictably sells the film as a "crawling hand" movie, is presented in standard ratio and seems to have been developed in a vat of cherry Kool-Aid. A far more attractive supplement is a 3m 45s slideshow of stills from the David del Valle archives.

But the disc's best feature is a thoroughly enjoyable and informative audio commentary track by star Ian Ogilvy, who is interviewed by film historian Darren Gross (author of the liner notes). Beginning with Ogilvy's delight at learning that he had shot this film in what would soon become the **ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW** castle, the track is likely to cover any questions viewers might have about the production. We learn how Ogilvy and company thought they were shooting a film simply entitled FENGRIFFEN, and how the more exploitable moniker was finally chosen after Harlan Ellison nixed Milton Subotsky's attempt to "borrow" the title of his unrelated story "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream." The (mal)functionings of the much-ballyhooed severed hand prop are duly related, as are reminiscences of working with the other recognizable performers in the cast—excluding Lom, who shared no scenes with Ogilvy. The actor also discusses his own film and television career, with the interesting similarity between his respective final scenes in both this and **WITCHFINDER GENERAL** covered in the process. A dozen chapters have been assigned to the feature, and the mono soundtrack has been given a fine two-channel Dolby Digital treatment. The DVD debut of the film itself will certainly attract some interest, but it's the presentation that makes the difference in this case, making this disc especially worthwhile. [Listed as OOP as we go to press, copies of —**AND NOW THE SCREAMING STARTS!** may still be in stores.—TJ]



Lucy Broadhurst (Lisbeth Humel) embarks on an erotic fairy tale dream in Walerian Borowczyk's *THE BEAST*.

THE BEAST

La Bête

aka *THE BEAST IN HEAT*

1975, Cult Epics, DD-2.0/LB,
\$24.95, 93m 35s, DVD-0

By Richard Harland Smith

Whatever the consensus of opinion on Walerian Borowczyk's preposterous, pornographic, yet genuinely erotic girl-meets-beast story *THE BEAST*, few can deny the film its due as the most notorious title in the 40 year career of the Polish-born filmmaker. Released in 1976, between Borowczyk's saucy anthology *IMMORAL TALES* [*Contes immoraux*, 1974] and his nunsploitational *BEHIND CONVENT WALLS* [*Interieur d'un couvent*, 1977], the project began as an 18m short subject shot in 1973 as *La véritable histoire de la bête du Gévaudan* intended to be included in *IMMORAL TALES*. (The featurette's eponymous

man-rodent—who would not have been out of place in Bert I. Gordon's *FOOD OF THE GODS*—was constructed by Borowczyk in 1972 at the behest of producer Anatole Dauman for utilization in a film by Alain Fleischer, who sued to block its use.) First exhibited as a work-in-progress at the 17th London Film Festival, *La véritable histoire...* was sufficiently scandalous to ensure an attentive (if not necessarily accepting) reception at the festival three years later, fleshed out to 90m as *THE BEAST*.

Based on a French legend, *THE BEAST* concerns itself with the familiar issues (to Borowczyk fans) of class privilege, religious hypocrisy and the contrivances of so-called destiny. To preserve his depleted bloodline, aging aristocrat Pierre d'Esperance (Guy Tréjan) agrees to marry off his horse breeder son Mathurin (Pierre Benedetti) to "the very beautiful Lucy Broadhurst"

(Lisbeth Humel), an American heiress. Complicating matters is the fact that the idiotic and antisocial Mathurin was never baptized, which prevents the proposed marriage from being blessed by the highly-placed Cardinal de Balo (as stipulated in the will of Lucy's late father). Estranged from his cardinal uncle, Pierre blackmails another uncle, Romello (veteran French actor Marcel Dalio) to reconcile the family so that Mathurin can be married off. An avowed woman-hater who poisoned his own bride years earlier, Romello contrives to foil Pierre's plan for fear that contact with the female sex will kill his grandnephew. When the local priest (Roland Armentel) arrives for the nuptials, Pierre must stall for time while he awaits word from Rome; meanwhile, Lucy loses herself in a daydream involving Mathurin's famed ancestor Romilda de l'Esperance (Sirpa

Lane), an 18th century beauty whom legend has it once encountered a fearful—and amorous—beast in the deep forests surrounding the family estate.

Before emigrating to Paris in the late '50s, Walerian Borowczyk trained as an illustrator at Krakow's Academy of Fine Arts, where he dabbled in painting, lithography and animation. Fascinated with peripheral details and period settings as much as with his agonized and antsy *dramatis personæ*, Borowczyk's films cannot be said to look painterly (in the style of British filmmaker and psycho-sexual provocateur Peter Greenaway) but evoke instead bricolage, diorama and mixed-media box constructions. Borowczyk counters a painter's natural inclination towards still life by keeping his camera mobile and a little clumsy (a style favored also by Germany's Rainer Werner Fassbinder), a tactic that prevents his deeply cynical yet somehow romantic films from feeling over-determined. Most of **THE BEAST**'s final third is taken up by the fantasy of Romilda's encounter with the freakishly-endowed beast, which makes graphic what was always suggested in such works as William Shakespeare's *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*, Merian C. Cooper & Ernest B. Schoedsack's **KING KONG** (1933) and Jean Cocteau's **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST** [*La belle et la bête*, 1946]. **THE BEAST** is not for the squeamish or the easily offended; if Borowczyk does not shy away from the comic possibilities of his dark fantasy, neither does he pull his punches in regard to its ejaculatory excesses.

Although **IMMORAL TALES** was widely condemned in Great Britain, a regime change within the BBFC allowed **THE BEAST**

to fall between the board's censorious cracks and pass uncut. Unlike most films branded a *cause célèbre*, **THE BEAST** has aged well, with no small thanks owed to its fully-committed cast. A discovery of Roger Vadim, Sirpa Lane would later appear in Mario Caiano's **NAZI LOVE CAMP 27** (*La svastika nel ventre*, 1977) and Alfonso Brescia's *La bestia nello spazio* (aka **THE BEAST IN SPACE**, 1978); Roland Armontel had acted opposite Christopher Lee in Terence Fisher's **SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE DEADLY NECKLACE** [*Sherlock Holmes und das Halsband des Todes*, 1963] and Pascale Rivault (as Pierre's insatiable daughter) was between sexy assignments in Stelvio Massi's **FIVE WOMEN FOR THE KILLER** [*5 donne per l'assassino*, 1974] and Just Jaekin's **LADY CHATTERLY'S LOVER** (1981). A familiar face in pre-war French cinema, Marcel Dalio fled Paris ahead of the advancing Third Reich, who used the actor's likeness on posters identifying the physical traits of the typical Jew; Dalio appeared in a score of Hollywood films (most indelibly, as **CASA-BLANCA**'s jittery croupier) before returning to Europe in the '60s, where he continued to appear in domestic and American fare until his death in 1983. Although he made a few significant films post-**THE BEAST**—notably, the revisionist *Docteur Jekyll et les Femmes* in 1981, Borowczyk's erotic preoccupations found him increasingly marginalized within the international film community and consigned to assignments on the order of **EMMANUELLE 5** (1985) before he retired in the 1990s.

THE BEAST looks exceptionally fine on this DVD from Cult

Epics, presented as one in a series of releases dedicated to "the most controversial films of the decade." The positive print source is in excellent condition, and this letterboxed (1.85:1) transfer distinguishes itself with a clear image and satisfyingly robust colors. (Some online reviews cite an erroneous 1.33:1 framing, which suggests a possible compatibility problem with particular players.) The film is presented in French with removable English subtitles, and the disc has been given 12 chapters. There are no extras, but a fully uncut and properly framed copy of the film is certainly an incentive in and of itself.

BLOOD FREAK

1971, *Something Weird Video*, DD-2.0/+, \$19.99, 79m 50s, DVD-1

By Tim Lucas

As hilarious as it is disturbing, and as weirdly inscrutable as it is hilarious, Brad F. Ginter's **BLOOD FREAK** is one of the most riotous, bewildering films to emerge from the 1970's horror exploitation slagheap. Writer/director Ginter—whose other films include **DEVIL RIDER!** (1970), **FLESH FEAST** (1970, Veronica Lake's swan song) and the incredible-sounding **NEVER THE TWAIN** (1974, in which Mark Twain becomes a sort of Connecticut Yankee in a Miami nudist camp)—is generally a more competent director than his fellow Floridian Herschell Gordon Lewis, though his films tend to turn out all the worse for it. After seeing the reeking eureka that is **BLOOD FREAK**, one inevitably wrestles with the impulse to seek out Ginter's other surviving work, but be advised that it never gets this good, or this delectably bad, again.

Steve Hawkes plays Herschell (nod to Mr. Lewis), a rugged, soft-spoken Vietnam veteran with badly burned arms, who has returned to the States to lead an aimless existence on his motorcycle. A pretty hitchhiker named Ann (Heather Hughes) takes him to a pot party, where he meets another fish out of water: Ann's born-again Christian sister Angel (Dana Cullivan), who is impressed by Herschell's stoic refusal of the festive amenities. Annoyed by his holier-than-thou conservatism ("It's not just his physical appearance that disturbs me, it's his head!"), Ann arranges to get Herschell hooked on a powerful, instantly addicting kind of marijuana. The next day, a meeting is arranged between Herschell and Mr. Nolan (Bob Currier), who runs a nearby poultry farm and offers the vet a job.

One day, after smoking another of Ann's lethal reefers, Herschell is asked to eat a freshly baked turkey which has been treated with special preservatives. The resulting clash of ingested chemicals knocks him out, and when he awakens, he finds himself transformed into a gobbling, turkey-headed freak with a taste for sadism and an insatiable thirst for blood. The entire cautionary tale is hosted and periodically interrupted by Grinter himself, who chain-smokes while dressed in pajamas, looking like Sleaze Personified, while pontificating on the fine points of the story as if it were a modern day PILGRIM'S PROGRESS.

The film's lead, Steve Hawkes, had previously worn the loin-cloth in some Spanish/Italian Tarzan films directed by Manuel Caño, and had worn even less in

some Miami-made Joe Sarno erotic films under the name "Steve Cipek" (a play on his real name of Steven Sipek); the cast list also notes the presence of one Francis Sipek, as well as Grinter's son Randy, who also worked as the film's sound recordist. The extensive damage visible on Hawkes' arms has been variously attributed to a fire on the set of an earlier film, and to reconstructive surgery that was performed after he was mauled by a tiger, either during one of his Tarzan films or at his own Florida-based animal sanctuary. Part of the fun of watching **BLOOD FREAK** is trying to imagine what, if anything, went through the mind of this East European immigrant while playing his role. The sheer spectacle of the Blood Freak (picture the Metaluna Mutant with a cardboard

You'll give thanks for Something Weird's BLOOD FREAK—the herb-basted turkey of all turkeys, now on DVD with all the trimmings.



beak and ruffled collar), his every macabre appearance accompanied by an inane tape loop of turkey gobbling, is impossible to take seriously, though his deeds are calculated to make any laughter stick in the throat. There is an extremely graphic scene of a man's leg being forceably amputated with a tablesaw, and the film reaches its climax with actual farmyard footage of a turkey's decapitation, a frantic headless dance followed by a long, hard stare at the sad, severed head lying on the ground. Similarly, the narration is so poker-faced that the film could be easily mistaken for most of its running time as a genuine Christian propaganda film gone berserk; but as the main story becomes more grimly violent, the narration becomes more transparently comic, as Grinter's baleful warnings about the dangers of addiction are cut short by a smoke-induced coughing fit. As the film ends, it's impossible to know where it stands, which only causes its confusing bouquet to linger in the senses, a bad cheese so pungent you won't be able to stop yourself from sharing it with friends.

The standard screen presentation looks poorly composed, yet delivers the full exposed aperture as the transfer was derived from the original negative. While the quality would hardly stop traffic, it is an improvement on the previous VHS releases (Regal Video and New Horizons, the latter not to be confused with Roger Corman's old company), with a picture as crisp as the source will allow and badly recorded audio which has been tweaked to sound about average.

Something Weird Video has festooned this herb-basted turkey with all the proverbial trimmings.

The stuffing begins with "Brad Grinter, Nudist" (9m 32s), a segment from **SWEET BIRD OF AQUARIUS** (1970) that finds Grinter (as "George Bowman") strutting around starkers with someone else you never thought you'd see naked, much less walking with a stiffy: **BLOOD FEAST**'s Thomas Wood (aka Rooney Kerwin). **NARCOTICS, PIT OF DESPAIR** (28m 51s) is a B&W 1950s high school reel that tells the melodramatic tale of John, a popular college athlete who fumbled his dreams of glory by befriending a bearded, drug-pushing classmate. **BEGGAR AT THE GATES** (23m 59s) is a wild color documentary about a 1970s religious cult that used psychedelics as a means of exploring spiritual consciousness. Ensuring that the disc will become a holiday perennial are **A DAY OF THANKSGIVING** (12m 30s), a B&W '50s short that shows how even poor families who can't afford a turkey can celebrate Turkey D... er, Thanksgiving, and **TURKEYS IN THE WILD** (19m 15s) is a "feel good" color documentary that pays absurdly solemn tribute to America's feathered, native "survivor." Also included is a condensed "featurette" presentation of **THE WALLS HAVE EYES** (1964, 28m 35s), Steve Hawkes' screen debut, in which he plays half of a couple whose activities are spied upon by a sub-Mabusian motel manager, who takes advantage of Steve's girlfriend during his absence. There are also some Easter eggs, including a drive-in trailer for a Thanksgiving turkey giveaway (Main Menu) and a radio spot for the film (Scene Selections).

Another interesting menu option also accesses a seemingly endless parade (18m 16s) of

wonderfully lurid horror fiction magazine covers from the 1970s, including **WITCHES TALES**, **TALES FROM THE TOMB** and **WEIRD TALES OF VODOO**, which ran stories with titles like "The Fly's Head," "The Flying Head" and "The Horror Without a Head." One may wonder what this feature has to do with the themes at hand, but these forgotten magazines look so addicting, one can easily imagine being driven to sell blood in order to collect them all.

BLUE SUNSHINE

1977, Synapse Films,
DD-5.1 & 1.0/16:9/LB/MA/+,
\$27.98, 94m 31s, DVD-1
By Tim Lucas

For those of us who frequented drive-in theaters in the 1970s, the unexpected pleasures of a movie like 1976's **SQUIRM** were sufficient to encourage the commitment to memory of the name Jeff Lieberman. This talented writer/director appeared at a juncture when American horror cinema seemed to be awaiting its next generational voice; in 1976, most of us had not seen anything from George A. Romero since **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD** (1968), neither Wes Craven or John Carpenter had yet offered a truly focused account of their abilities, and David Cronenberg's feature debut **SHIVERS** (1975) had yet to penetrate the lower 50. With his quirky characters, his conceptual interest in science and chemistry gone amok, his oddball sense of humor and his fondness for mixing horror and biological revulsion, Lieberman's work paralleled Cronenberg's own. That quality came into its fullest focus with his second theatrical feature, **BLUE SUNSHINE**, which



Zalman King traces an epidemic of hair loss to a decade-old secret in Jeff Lieberman's BLUE SUNSHINE.

seems proto-Cronenbergian in every way, except for some pointed comments on the state of America, which are at odds with Cronenberg's Canadian films, which tend to be typically and unspecifically "North American."

Made in the wake of our nation's ubiquitous Bicentennial celebrations, **BLUE SUNSHINE** offers a fast-moving, unpredictable and unsettlingly inconclusive panorama of young Americans being tripped up (literally) by past misdeeds just at the point when they are poised to make a difference as responsible adults. Zalman King stars as Jerry "Zippy" Zipkin, who is at a party with old classmates when Frannie (Richard Crystal, Billy's brother) suddenly loses all of his hair, tenses up, and flees the house. Three of the men and Jerry's girlfriend Alicia (Deborah Winters) decide to look for Frannie by car, while Zippy prods the surrounding woods with a flashlight. Meanwhile, Frannie doubles back to the cottage and attacks the three

women left behind, shoving them into a crackling fireplace. To simplify a longer and more complicated series of events, Zippy is mistakenly identified as the perpetrator and he flees the crime scene to avoid arrest. While on the lam, he discovers that other, similar incidents have taken place around town and that all of these bald maniacs graduated from Stanford University ten years ago, where they experimented with a home-brewed brand of LSD called Blue Sunshine. The former manufacturer and pusher of that product, cordial Ed Flemming (LOST IN SPACE's Mark Goddard), is in the process of running for the US Congress and can't acknowledge his role in this past scenario, or identify his past customers (and thus prevent any number of possible deaths), without ruining his political future.

Opening with one of the most original and compelling main title sequences to be found in the genre, **BLUE SUNSHINE** is at

once the most distinctive of Jeff Lieberman's features and his most problematical. In his audio commentary (moderated by an appreciative Edwin Samuelson), Lieberman acknowledges and explains the movie's greatest weakness, which is that Zipkin—played by an already offbeat actor—reacts to most situations in irrational ways that tend to worsen his situation and make him a frustrating protagonist, difficult to champion. The idea was to use Zippy's off-kilter behavior to foster audience suspicions about his own possible exposure to the drug, but since he acts weird from his first scene, since he is not identified as a Stanford grad, since the phrase "Blue Sunshine" mystifies him for so long, and since it isn't even identified as a drug until late in Act II, this explanation hardly seems causally apt. Lieberman also painted himself into a corner by including an operating room scene though he knew nothing about surgical tools or

procedure, which results in the embarrassing spectacle of actor Robert Walden—otherwise excellent in the picture—feverishly requesting, “Long instrument!” Fortunately, the film’s basic idea is so arresting and the *mise-en-scène* has moments of such gratifying style (eg., the 180° pan after Zippy’s escape which seamlessly joins two scenes shot at the same location some time apart) that the film ably survives its own eccentricities, delivering the requisite share of memorable set-pieces and shock images. Notable presences in the supporting cast are Alice Ghostley, DARK SHADOWS’ James Storm, October 1978 Playmate Marcy Hanson and BLADE RUNNER’s Brion James as Toho’s own Rodan.

Synapse has produced a fine 16:9 digital transfer of the film from a surviving 35mm print (one of only 50 that Lieberman estimates were struck by its US distributor, Cinema Shares), as the original negative no longer exists. While the image quality is not as crisp as a negative or interpositive source would have yielded, it is certainly very good,

with occasional grain in low-light situations but with color that manages to be both rich and subtle. In his commentary, Lieberman points out one shot which never looked good on video before but was perfected here, for the first time, by a digital matte process. A restoration demonstration segment also shows some before/after examples, which helps one to appreciate the extra mile that Synapse walked in order to bring **BLUE SUNSHINE** to DVD. The 1.78:1 letterboxing yields a couple of moments when the framing hints at an original 1.66 ratio, but the compositions are never impeded for more than a few seconds. The original mono soundtrack is provided, as well as a new Dolby 5.1 remix, which lends more range and presence to Charles Gross’ Stomu Yamash’ta-like score, as well as some startling directional surprises; on the whole, though, the mono mix is preferable, because the picture was shot cheaply and its visuals seem at a disadvantage in tandem with a 21st Century soundscape.

The supplements are dominated by “Lieberman on Lieberman” (38m), an extended on-camera interview which finds the writer/director holding court in a snakeskin jacket and talking about his career in films, on and off the set. Though it overlooks his interesting TV-movie **DR. FRANKEN** (co-directed with Marvin J. Chomsky) and spends too much time on his near-brushes with the nascent origins of **STAR WARS**, it’s a fairly entertaining and informative session. In the most interesting portion, Lieberman recounts a dinner conversation with John Carpenter, who pointed out to him that **BLUE SUNSHINE** was the biggest hit at a 1977 British film festival, which Lieberman (a working family man) couldn’t afford to attend; Carpenter did, and by his own admission, on the strength of his less well-received **ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13**, he was offered the chance to direct **HALLOWEEN**. This is the sort of valuable, practical life lesson that few commentaries put forth, and the disc actually harbors a few others, as well. A good trailer (2m 22s) is included, as well as a stills gallery, which includes some behind-the-scenes shots.

The most interesting of all the supplements, however, is a short anti-drug film called **THE RINGER** (1971, 19m 40s), which Lieberman made for King Features at the age of 21. His first fiction piece as a writer/director, this cautionary satire depicts the manipulation of the young by Big Business, in three separate but similar stories that ultimately come together like a strong piano chord. In one segment, a group of businessmen plot the publicity campaign of a custom nose ring kit called “The Ringer”; in another, a record company

LSD flashbacks flash-forward to homicidal rages and death for the unlucky denizens of BLUE SUNSHINE.



lavishes endless money on an album project by the manufactured rock group "Leo, Hobbs and Persol" (headed by Elliot Chiprut, the "millionaire at 22" composer of The 1910 Fruitgum Company's bubblegum classic "Simon Says"), which will be sold to gullible counterculturists as a no-budget endeavor on a phony grassroots record label; and finally, a couple of corrupt, aging gangsters hire a younger man (RHODA's David Groh) to serve as a more contemporary image for the product they want to foist on America's young: drugs. In all three cases, the old regime are smugly confident that "Kids'll eat it up!" while the younger voices in their midst are skeptical, thinking that today's youth are hip enough to know when they're being lied to, but Lieberman's film shows—cynically, or maybe just honestly—that experience tends to know what it's talking about. Made at a time when even clip-on nose rings were a truly unthinkable fashion accessory, and well in advance of *faux* chart-topping acts like Milli Vanilli, THE RINGER has only become truer with time. Well-written, ambitious in its structure and as biting as good satire should be, it also works thematically well in support of **BLUE SUNSHINE** and is fully deserving of its resurrection. Lieberman (who plays a small part in the film himself) also provides an interesting commentary for the short, identifying a few of the unbilled actors, mentioning some of the historical counterparts to the film that inspired its concept, telling the story of how the film was made and received, and mentioning some of the awards it won. THE RINGER ends with a Pepsi presentational logo that was later pulled from the film after young audiences started booing it as a

symbol of the very forms of business villified in the story.

A second disc is an exclusive CD pressing of Charles Gross' music soundtrack in full stereo (13 tracks, 34m 55s). Some of the cues sound edited (splices and early fades, some hard fades, and an occasional grunt or groan left in the mix reveals that they were culled from the movie's sound reels rather than the original studio tapes), and the disc seems to have been programmed according to its order of use in the film. Therefore, the strongest material—the suspenseful, jittery cues—are shuffled together with some dated lite jazz, the songs performed by the Streisand and Sinatra puppets at an Ed Flemming mall rally, and of course, the disco song from the nightclub where big Wayne Mulligan (Ray Young) goes berserk. Even so, much of Gross's work rewards listening on its own merits and this separate presentation is much appreciated.

An enclosure illustrated with tantalizing foreign advertising art ("*la drogue bleue... plus terrifiante que le LSD!*") includes a menu for the 17 chapter marks and an informative two-page background essay by Michael Felsher and Edwin Samuelson.

CRIMSON

Las Ratas no Duermen de Noche

"Rats Don't Sleep at Night"
aka **L'Homme à Tête Coupée**
"The Man Without a Head"
1973, Image Entertainment,
DD-1.0/MA/16:9/LB/ST/+,
\$24.95, 89m 15s, DVD-1
By Richard Harland Smith

When is a Paul Naschy movie not a Paul Naschy movie? When the Spanish horror star is top-billed in a 90m caper flick through which he spends the first

hour unconscious—only to be revived for a climax that compels him to clomp through moon-lit woods in the manner of *el hombre lobo*. Fleeing a botched jewel heist, safecracker Surnett (Naschy) takes a bullet in the head while crashing a police roadblock. With Surnett's injury requiring surgery, partner Henri (Olivier Mathot) and disgraced gangland doctor Rieder (Carlos Otero) crash the country home of a professor (Ricardo Palmerola) renowned for his work in the field of brain transplantation. Fearing for the safety of his family, the Professor agrees to repair Surnett's damaged gray cells provided Henri can provide "the brain of a recently deceased man." Sent to Paris to procure a fresh specimen, driver Paul (Claude Boisson, aka "Yul Sanders") and gunman Karl (Victor Israel) return with the head of their rival—a thug whose mercilessness has branded him "The Sadist." Surely with The Sadist's brain transplanted into Surnett's body, everything will be alright.

Despite Naschy's limited screen time, this French-Spanish co-production remains enjoyable thanks to its repertory of Euro-Cult players, who manage to flesh-out their by-the-numbers characterizations with some piquant quirks. Popeyed Spaniard Vic Israel (in a ratty hairpiece and handlebar moustache) has one of his better roles as the edgy gunsels whose sticky fingers trip the jewelry store alarm (a nod to Jules Dassin's **RIFIFI**), while Carlos Otero brings true pathos to his role as the soused sawbones. As the professor's moralistic wife, who must act as her crippled husband's hands (shades of Peter Cushing in Hammer's "Frankenstein" films), Sylvia Solár has never played it straighter, nor

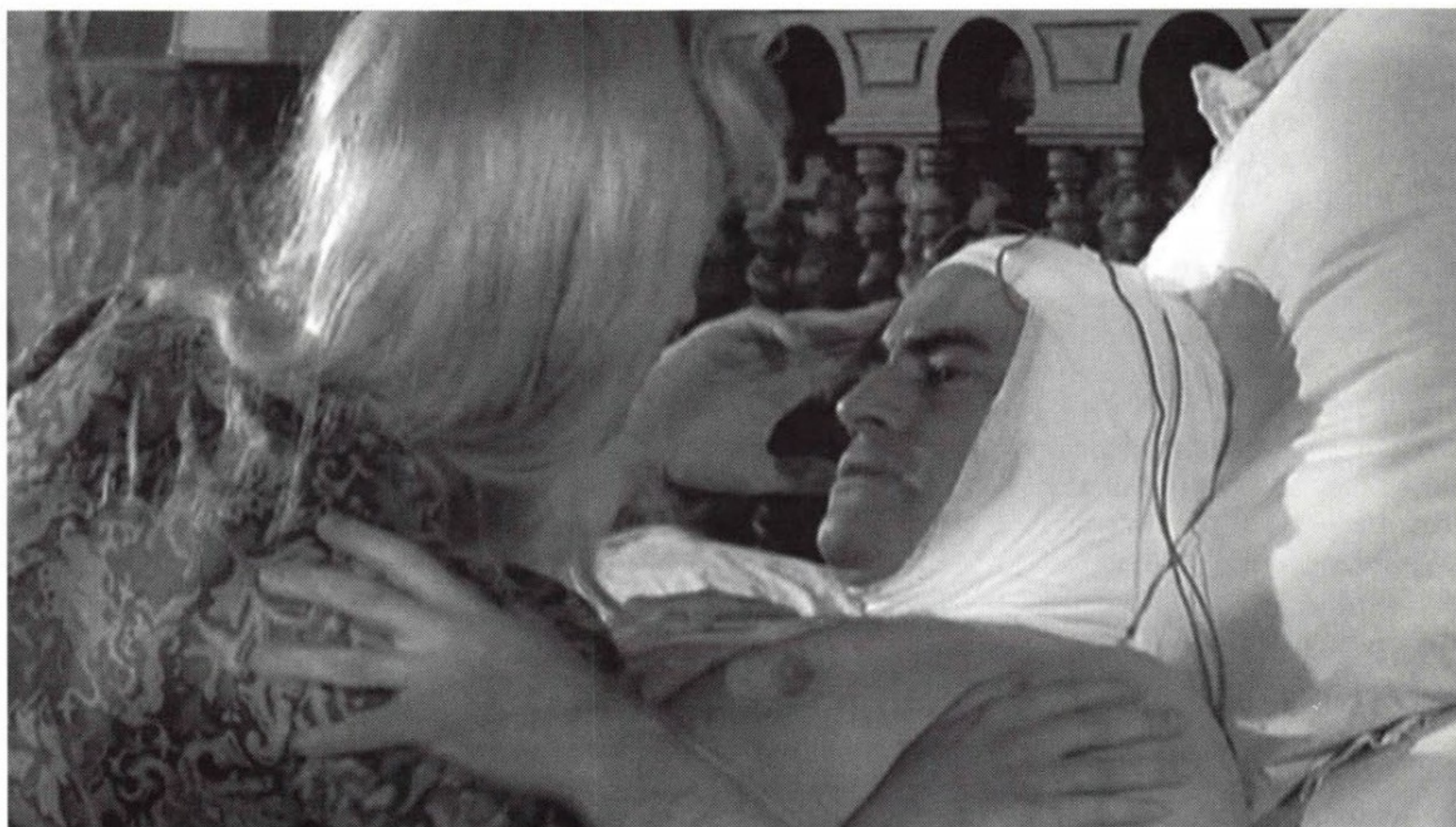
has the unsung Paris-born scream queen (**NIGHT OF THE HOWLING BEAST**, **EYEBALL**, **CANNIBAL TERROR**) been more alluring. Israel, Otero, Solár, Mathot, Evelyn Scott (as The Sadist's vindictive moll) and Richard Kolin (as the Sadist's hey-boy Willi) would later turn up *en masse* in Georges Gigo's **DEVIL KISS** aka **THE WICKED CARESSES OF SATAN** (*La perversa caricia de Satan*, 1975; reviewed VW 29:22 and recently issued by Image on DVD). Neither Juan Fortuny's direction nor Raymond Heil's camerawork is especially distinguished, yet **CRIMSON** benefits from an appropriately sleazy jazz score by Daniel White and some uncommonly attractive production design; Juan Alberto Soler's eclectic credits as an art director include Antonio Margheriti's **LIGHTNING BOLT**, Vicente Aranda's **THE BLOOD SPATTERED BRIDE** and Giuliano Montaldo's heist melodrama **GRAND SLAM** (currently available on DVD from Blue Underground).

Never theatrically released in the US, *Las ratas no duermen de noche* debuted on video in the States on the Wizard label as **CRIMSON** ("The Color of Terror"). Cropped and clocking in at 85m 17s, the transfer was decent, albeit dark; the Wizard tape was also burdened by a grating English language soundtrack and was missing a cabaret number seen 25m into the DVD (which introduced the characters of *Le Sadique* and Willi a bit earlier). Image's letterboxed (1.76:1, 16:9 enhanced) transfer restores the missing sequence, a *faux* mondo mating dance involving a scantily clad showgirl and two fur-vested Mongols; the bit is so *outré* and garishly colorful (and edited-in so crudely) that it has to have been borrowed from another film entirely, one made at least a decade earlier. Although **CRIMSON** is no one's idea of a key purchase, the Image disc looks incredibly fine, with a clear, brighter image and strong colors. Minor grain is appreciable

throughout and there are some vertical creases that occur late in the film, but these blemishes do not detract from what is otherwise a satisfying viewing experience. The film's English dub has been included here (warts and all—including one boner where Monique Gerard's flower seller mistakenly refers to The Sadist as Surnett), but the French soundtrack is the way to go. English subtitles are optional. (Both the English and French soundtracks are guilty of piping in expletives where characters clearly say nothing.) The disc has been given 15 chapters.

As great as it is to have such a Euro-Cult oddity in near-pristine condition, Image Entertainment has gone the extra mile by providing some choice extras. An alternate French title sequence (2m 2s) is included, which makes exclusive use of a painted street scene (with one cutaway to a French title card), and a French trailer (2m 48s) is offered *sans sous-titres*. The disc's promised

Virile Paul Naschy can still contemplate romance with Evelyn Scott after receiving the transplanted brain of "The Sadist" in CRIMSON.



talent filmographies never materialize, but the roster of supplements is well rounded out by a full reel of alternate erotic footage." Much of this footage consists of either peek-a-boo nudity or action-halting (if inexplicit) porn filler; the inserts involving Naschy's character are at least interesting for how poorly-matched Naschy is to his scrawny surrogate. (Curiously, in the add-on where Surnett rapes the professor's wife, the screen goes blank for a full minute, while the soundtrack rolls on.)

Image's packaging of **CRIMSON** as part of their "EuroShock Collection" is first rate, although their kepcase copy erroneously refers to the film as one of Naschy's earliest; in truth, Naschy was pretty much at the height of his powers as "Spain's most popular werewolf," having completed seven installments of his "Waldemar Daninsky" series and played the lead in such classic Spanish horrors as Javier Aguirre's **COUNT DRACULA'S GREAT LOVE** and **THE HUNCHBACK OF THE MORGUE**, León Klimovsky's **VENGEANCE OF THE ZOMBIES** and Carlos Aured's **HORROR RISES FROM THE TOMB, THE MUMMY'S REVENGE** and **BLUE EYES OF THE BROKEN DOLL**—all of which have yet to make their DVD debut in this country.

FEAR IN THE NIGHT

1972, Anchor Bay Entertainment, DD-2.0/MA/16:9/LB/+, \$19.98, 93m 40s, DVD-1
By Kim Newman

The DVD release of **STRAIGHT ON TILL MORNING** [VW 89:66] and **FEAR IN THE NIGHT** means that Hammer fans can recreate in their own homes the studio's faintly desperate 1972 "Women

in Terror!" double-bill. Originally scripted in the early 1960s (as **THE CLAW** or **BRAINSTORM**) by Jimmy Sangster, **FEAR IN THE NIGHT** winds up Hammer's informal series of "PSYCHO-type pictures," which commenced with **TASTE OF FEAR** [US: **SCREAM OF FEAR**, 1961] and actually derive more from Henri-Georges Clouzot's **Les Diaboliques** [US: **DIABOLIQUE**, 1955] than the Hitchcock film. On the commentary track, Sangster reveals that his first draft took place on a yacht; the rewrite by Michael Syson, which got it into production (with Sangster doing his smoothest job of direction), relocated the story to a boys' school, though Sangster doesn't note that the effect of this is to make it seem even *more* like **Les Diaboliques**. It seems odd, in retrospect, that several of Hammer's earlier efforts (**TASTE OF FEAR**, **MANIAC**) evoke Clouzot by taking location trips and setting their stories in France, when the provincial school setting of **Les Diaboliques** would actually have more resonance in an English context. Though the pupils are represented only by recorded angelic singing voices and classroom badinage, this suspenser is one of an occasional run of British horror-suspense pictures with public (ie: fee-paying) school settings, including **UNMAN, WITTERING AND ZIGO** (1971) and **ABSOLUTION** (1978).

The film opens quietly with shots of a country house and grounds (played by Haberdasher's Arts School in Hertfordshire), overlaid with children singing but with no one in sight until a pair of dangling boots indicate someone is hanging from a tree by the playing fields. Then we flash back to a typical it's-all-a-plot set-up: naïve 22-year-old

Peggy (**DOOMWATCH**'s Judy Geeson), newly-married to schoolmaster Robert Heller (**HORROR OF FRANKENSTEIN**'s Ralph Bates), is recovering from a nervous breakdown and prone to episodes in which she thinks she imagines attacks from a mysterious figure with a black-gloved artificial arm. Moving into a cottage on the grounds of the school where Robert works, Peggy encounters dotty headmaster Michael Carmichael (Peter Cushing, perhaps flashing back to his performance in a 1955 TV adaptation of **THE BROWNING VERSION**), who reveals his own sinister artificial arm while fiddling with Peggy's hair, and Michael's rabbit-shooting, sculptress-of-screaming-heads wife Molly (Joan Collins, warming up for her later title role in **THE BITCH**), who coos nastily enough to set anyone's nerves on edge. If you've ever seen one of these things (or even check out the stills on the back cover), you'll have no trouble predicting plot developments, identifying culprits and victims and even guessing whose boots those were in the credits. There is, however, a nice, creepy revelation about the set-up of the school, with Cushing's headmaster a distant cousin to Alec McCowen's pretend-vicar in **THE WITCHES** (1966).

Unlike the jagged, unconventional, very 1972 (if not very good) **STRAIGHT ON TILL MORNING**, this is an unambitious programmer which does well a job that had been done too many times before. Blonde, not-conventionally-pretty-but-always-appealing Geeson carries almost all the weight of the film, rationalizing away all her perils as hallucinations and going to pieces as she is stalked all around the house

by figures with black gloves and the power of punching through doors. Known to fans for her horror appearances in everything from **BERSERK!** (1967) to **INSEMINOID** (1981), and amazingly committed to giving real performances in even these despised quickies, Geeson was at her best as melting or nervous ingenues, including an outstanding TV version of *A ROOM WITH A VIEW* in the Helena Bonham Carter role; her sister Sally, a UK sitcom star, plays the saucy maid in **THE OBLONG BOX** (1969). Apart from a few one-scene bits from familiar faces like James Cossins (**THE ANNIVERSARY**), it is basically a four-character

piece, with Cushing alternately charming and menacing in very few scenes (even when the killer hand is Cushing, his face is often offscreen), Collins modelling hunting outfits that don't quite disguise her then-pregnancy, and Bates stuck with the thankless role of the dimly devoted husband who gets to be victimized (as is revealed by the trailer) as well as menacing. Sangster's direction gets the job done and there's a certain pleasure of familiarity, but a few more surprising surprises wouldn't have gone amiss. The most significant line, sending up the whole *Diaboliques* genre, comes when an impatient conspirator snaps "Why

do you have to be so *devious*? Why couldn't you have just taken him out into the woods and shot him yourself?"

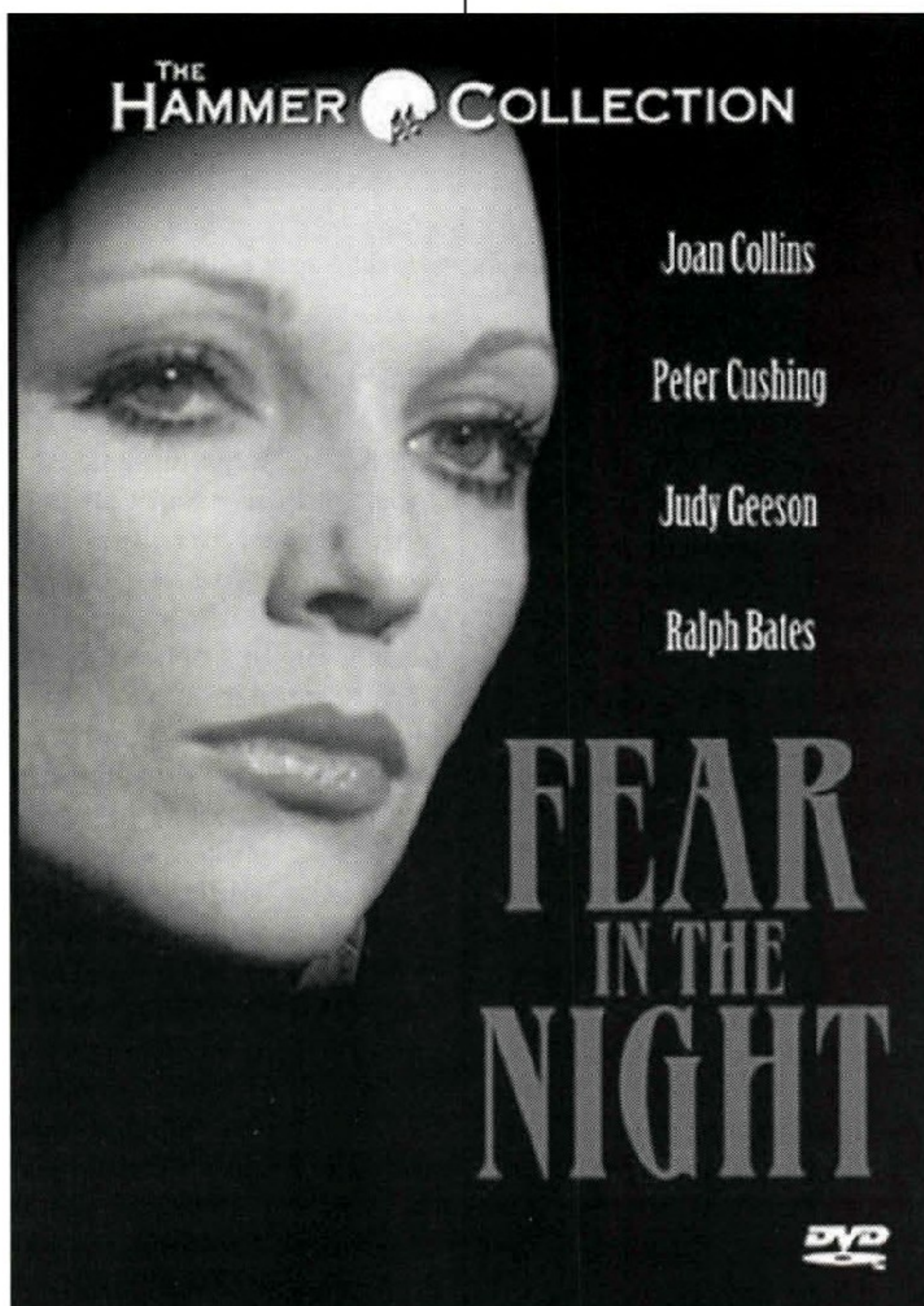
Anchor Bay Entertainment's DVD has an approximate 1.85:1 ratio enhanced for 16:9, 22 chapter stops and acceptable English and French mono tracks. The picture quality is well up to the exacting standards of AB's "Hammer Collection": a thirty-year-old picture nobody much cared about at the time, this still receives a near-perfect transfer that shows off Arthur Grant's careful cinematography (any "emerald teal" here is just as it should be) and Don Picton's detailed but unfussy art direction. The insert card has notes by Rand Vossler, while the cover image and alphabetical order billing seem to sell it oddly as a Joan Collins vehicle. Aside from the trailer, the only extra is an audio commentary by Sangster and Hammer historian Marcus Hearn that often strays quite widely from the film at hand, covering the whole of the **PSYCHO**-type series and various other (fairly familiar) Hammer-related subjects.

THE HILLS HAVE EYES PART 2

1984, Image Entertainment,
DD-1.0/+, \$24.99, 86m 24s,
DVD-1

By Stephen R. Bissette

An unnecessary sequel that nevertheless proved essential to Wes Craven's career (making him once again bankable, and on the road to career redemption/resurrection with **A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET** the same year this travesty hit video shelves), **THE HILLS HAVE EYES PART II** (onscreen title, not "PART 2" as on the poster and all video/DVD packaging) has hardly sweetened with age, though we should be





*There's nothing Mickey Mouse about Michael Berryman's performance as Pluto in **THE HILLS HAVE EYES, PART 2**. Too bad we can't say the same for the rest of the picture!*

thankful that it failed to manifest a franchise series. Craven's sequel opens with a reflexive steal from countless previous cannibal films, domestic breed and third-world stock: "The following film is based on fact..." herein an even greater lie than usual. The following film is, in fact, based on opportunistic producers' hunger for easy profits, based on the healthy returns which Craven's original, harrowing, and far superior **THE HILLS HAVE EYES** (1977) netted in all markets. Whatever "fact" the first film drew from—primarily the legacy of the Scottish coastal cannibal clan led by Sawney Beane, transposed to the barren bomb-test-blasted deserts of Western America—was further fueled by Craven and his crew's hunger to make a balls-to-the-wall confrontational horror film, a

high-octane blend indeed, that still leaves its retarded sibling in the dust.

That said, the best of what little this film has to offer is found in its opening scenes, before the already-calcified templates of the teen-slasher genre circa 1984 fix the film into tedium. There are flashes here of Craven's intelligence at work: the opening psychiatrist session with Bobby (Robert Houston), survivor of the first film, is palpably effective in conveying Bobby's terror of returning to the desert despite strong business motives (a motorcycle race that would allow his team to demonstrate the virtues of his new "Super Formula" fuel, prompting sales and a hoped-for corporate buy-out), but the same sequence also introduced the sequel's lazy dependence on

"flashback" footage lifted from the original **THE HILLS HAVE EYES**. The sequel's sassiest and most intriguing conceit is that white-bread-brother Bobby would have married cannibal-family-refugee Ruby aka Rachel (Janus Blythe, delivering a fine performance in a vacuum) during the eight-year interim, a relationship slyly introduced and allowed to percolate in the mind of viewers familiar with the first film—*sans*, sadly, anything but the briefest of contact between Bobby and Rachel/Ruby. The fact that so little is made of this fascinating turn of events is emblematic of the restrictions Craven had to function within, and the impoverished lack of imaginative engagement that consistently favors the tried-and-tired over any fresh blood.

Enter Bobby and Rachel's team, a likable-enough generic pack of clean-cut teens and twenty-somethings. There's the nominal hero Roy (Kevin Blair) and his blind girlfriend Cass (Tamara Stafford); hunky biker-jock Hulk (John Laughlin, later of Ken Russell's **CRIMES OF PASSION**); cocky wise-guy Harry (Peter Frechette) and his girl Jane (Colleen Riley); team mechanic Foster (Willard Pugh, who went on to play the limo-driver who saves the day in **DIE HARD**) and his spunky gal Sue (Penny Johnson). Harry, of course, blurts out the "legend" of the cannibal desert clan as he drives the team bus into oblivion, prompting more flashback footage as Rachel/Ruby recalls having to kill her homicidal kin to save Bobby's baby niece. In no time, the bus is stranded (due to the contrivance of the shift from daylight savings time having them miss registration, prompting the inevitable fatal "shortcut" to nowhere) with a hole in the gas tank and no fuel or rescue in sight. Signal mirrors flash from rock to rock as "Welcum" signs dangle from creepy signposts, adorned with feathers, skulls, and bones. Rachel/Ruby's latent feral skills kick in as she senses the survivors of her flesh-eating family might still be about, and patented point-of-view shots from the hillside are accompanied by heavy breathing and grunting. Most laughable of all is the surviving pet German Shepherd enjoying his own flashbacks from the first film—neatly curtailed to eliminate footage of Beast's maiming and killing of Michael Berryman's iconic cannibal mutant Pluto, who is indeed back for an encore. "Just be careful," Rachel/Ruby warns when they trundle into an apparently

abandoned mining encampment. "People who live this far out usually have a reason."

Of course, young victims need no such reasons to line themselves up for the kill, and we have no reason to fear for their demise (as we did for the family and their baby in the original) as they deserve whatever befalls them. At every turn, any shred of plot potential introduced—Cass' supposedly "near-psychic" super sensitivity, Rachel/Ruby's initial confrontation with Pluto, the team setting "booby traps" for who they presume to be their own jokester teammates—is soundly trounced by the intrusion of genre clichés. No sooner does the team discover they are being stalked than the three bikers tear ass across the desert, separating and becoming easy-pickings for the cannibal clan. No sooner does darkness fall 45 minutes into the proceedings and Rachel/Ruby wisely say, "Stay together and stay alert!" than she and Hulk go looking for their missing teammates (eventually costing Hulk his life), Foster and Sue trot out to the bus for a quickie, and Cass and Sue find a working shower in a dark hovel, prompting Sue to exclaim "This is too good to pass up!" while Cass wanders off alone. Cass asserts, "I may be blind, but I'm not handicapped," though she seems impaired throughout the second half of the film by the sort of conveniently selective sensory-deprivation necessary to the next mind-numbing set piece. Cass is so *un*-psychic (like Forrest Whitaker in **SPECIES**) that she repeatedly fails to hear the sounds of attack that seem to be erupting from various adjacent rooms, shacks, and/or settings nearby—most risibly, the death of one of her

friends whose noisy death throes include screams, shattering glass as she is thrown through a window, and The Reaper's own persistent bellowing and laughter.

Oh, yes: The Reaper. I forgot to mention that the greatest lapse between the two **HILLS HAVE EYES** films may be Craven's failure to base the sequel's surviving clan of cannibals on potentially-rich matriarchal bedrock. Aside from Ruby and Pluto (who, via the first film's ruthless logic, couldn't have survived at all), the only surviving cannibal of the first film was Ruby's mother, last seen stumbling out of the clan abode with a minor head wound. Instead of resurrecting her, the sequel concocts another male bogeyman, dead Papa Jupiter's previously (and conveniently) unmentioned "big brother," The Reaper (**THE INCREDIBLE TWO-HEADED TRANSPLANT**'s John Bloom). Eschewing the Berni Wrightson-like character design of the first **HILL**'s grotty Sawney Beane surrogates, The Reaper looks and acts like a refugee from Humungous' mercenary biker tribe in George Miller's **THE ROAD WARRIOR**, first revealed fully onscreen here bellowing at the top of his lungs astride a stolen dirt bike. Unlike James Whitworth's wily, scarred brute patriarch of the first **HILLS**, The Reaper is a fanged troglodyte, lacking any characterization whatsoever in the mode of post-**HILLS** pop bogeymen like Michael Myers and Jason Vorhees (cue Harry Manfredini's score, pilfering his own **FRIDAY THE 13th** soundtrack). It's the final nail in the film's coffin, despite one other promising flourish (what Pluto refers to as "Reaper's special mine shaft," a subterranean abattoir that recalls the reality of the Sawney Beane's cannibal

slaughterhouse in caverns beneath the Scottish shoreline) that leads to nought. Tobe Hooper would make far grander use of a more garishly expansive underground butcher's den for his unnecessary **THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE PART 2**, which in every department betters Craven's work here).

Even gorehounds will be disappointed: there is only one onscreen gore effect (a throat-slashing) and nothing, but nothing, to approach the sweaty intensity of the original. For horror franchise lovers, we duly note the participation of a pre-Jason Kane Hodder among the stunt crew. Michael Berryman is the only bright spot here for diehard fans, energetic as usual and giving his all in a sadly underwritten, one-note role that only diminishes Pluto's stature. Craven did better by Berryman in 1981's **DEADLY BLESSING**.

This sorry sequel's enduring reputation as a formulaic embarrassment is only reinforced by Image's new DVD release, which improves not at all on the film's previous video incarnations. In fact, this standard transfer appears to be taken from the same source elements as Thorn-EMI/HBO's OOP VHS release, with the format change only inflicting further damage. It looks more like a direct-to-video orphan than it ever has before. The DVD's chalky fleshtones too often break down into shifting pixels, and rocky desert locations broken by harsh early-morning or late-afternoon shadows shifting uneasily between light and dark zones like badly-aligned matte effects (of which, by the way, there is one—for the second shot of the clan signaling each other with mirrors). The visuals improve slightly once darkness falls, stabilizing

the transfer enough to make it a more acceptable viewing experience. The mono audio is bland and stale throughout. The only extras are the theatrical trailer, chapter stops, and the choice of English or French language. One of Image's most threadbare releases, but this is a movie that hardly deserved better.

KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL

1952, *Dark City Classics/Image Entertainment*, DD-1.0/+, \$24.99, 99m 6s, DVD-1

By Richard Harland Smith

Director Phil Karlson never hit the big time during his 30-plus years as a filmmaker (his most successful picture, 1973's **WALKING TALL**, was his next-to-last), but B-movies are better off for his having been there. Born Philip Karlstein in Chicago in 1908, Karlson paid his way through law school toiling on the Universal backlot as a propman and film cutter before trying his hand at directing. After a string of short subjects and undistinguished features (including a few entries in Monogram's "Charlie Chan" series), Karlson began to make a name for himself as a director of efficient and hard-hitting crime thrillers beginning with **SCANDAL SHEET** (1952), based on a novel by Sam Fuller. Through the 1950s, Karlson churned out such two-fisted tales as **99 RIVER STREET** (1953), **TIGHT SPOT** with Ginger Rogers and Edward G. Robinson, the heist drama **5 AGAINST THE HOUSE**, the fact-based **THE PHENIX CITY STORY** (all 1955) and **THE BROTHERS RICO** (1957). Less well-known is Karlson's sophomore effort, the deceptively-titled south of the border suspenser

KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL (1952), which is presented here by Dark City Films as a special edition DVD distributed by Image Entertainment.

John Payne stars as Joe Rolfe, a disgraced WWII veteran fresh out of prison and reduced to making deliveries for a Kansas City florist. When the local branch of the Southwest Bank is hit for \$1.2 million by three masked gunmen driving a van identical to Joe's, Assistant DA Martin (**REEFER MADNESS'** Carleton Young) pressures the innocent parolee to aid the investigation. Facing twenty years in the jug for a crime he didn't commit, Joe calls in a favor from a friend he saved at Okinawa and follows a tip to Tijuana, where "two-bit heel" Pete Harris (Jack Elam) is biding his time until he can claim his split of the bank heist. When Harris is gunned down by Mexican police, Joe assumes his identity and takes his place at the gang reunion in Borados. Checking in at the Hacienda del Sol, Joe susses out that habitual criminal Tony Romano (Lee Van Cleef) and cop killer Boyd Kane (Neville Brand) are the other two gunmen whose identities have been kept from one another to keep the caper "foolproof and stool pigeon-proof." Pulling the strings is "The Big Guy" (Preston Foster), a resentful ex-cop forced into early retirement. Foster plans to double-cross the gang by alerting insurance agents to the location of the split from the bank job, ensuring for himself a return to prestige and a \$300,000 reward. Complicating Foster's scheme is the unexpected arrival of his law student daughter Helen (**NIGHTMARE ALLEY's** Coleen Gray), who takes an instant liking to the vengeful Joe.



"What do you mean, 'we,' masked man?" Jack Elam turns the tables on "Big Guy" Preston Foster in Phil Karlson's noir favorite KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL.

As in the best *films noir* (Jacques Tourneur's **OUT OF THE PAST**, Henry Hathaway's **KISS OF DEATH** and Orson Welles' **THE THIRD MAN** and **TOUCH OF EVIL**), **KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL** charts the redemptive arc not of one man, but of two. Preston Foster's old school copper (made redundant by "politics") and John Payne's war hero (whose Bronze Star wouldn't buy him a cup of coffee) are depicted as true believers beached at the ass-end of the American Dream. True to convention, Joe Rolfe must plumb his own capacity for evil before he can find his way out of the darkness, one of several parallels **KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL** shares with Ringo Lam's **CITY ON FIRE** and Quentin Tarantino's **RESERVOIR DOGS**.

If the film feels a touch schizophrenic, bouncing from serial and documentary modes to such signature *noir* touches as the use of foreboding shadows (Joe's grilling by the police) and cliché hipster dialogue ("What's the idea, tossin' my joint?") before its **KEY LARGO**-style third act, **KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL** remains worthwhile on the strength of its cast and as a look back at the trajectory of an up-and-coming filmmaker whose best years lay ahead of him. Perpetual good guy John Payne was later cast against type as the titular kingpin of Byron Haskin's **THE BOSS** (1956), a corrupt Kansas City businessman (and WWI veteran) who turned to a life of crime when he lost his savings in the Great Depression.

KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL was one of the last big screen assignments for cameraman George E. Diskant, who shot **THEY LIVE BY NIGHT** (1949) for Nicholas Ray and **THE NARROW MARGIN** (1952) for Richard Fleischer before finishing his career in episodic TV. The project began as an original story by Harold Greene and Rowland Brown (Brown co-wrote **ANGELS WITH DIRTY FACES** and **JOHNNY APOLLO**) fleshed out as a screenplay by George Bruce and Harry J. Essex, a latter a former New York newsman who went on to direct **I, THE JURY** (1953) and co-write the screenplays for **IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE** (1953) and **THE CREATURE OF THE BLACK LAGOON** (1954). (Director Karlson and leading man Payne both made

uncredited contributions to the script as well.) **KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL** is no classic, but remains a must-see in light of the triple-threat casting of Jack Elam (first seen "duck hunting" a full ashtray for smokable butts), Lee Van Cleef and Neville Brand. A stickler for minor details that speak volumes about character, Karlson gives each actor his trademark signifiers: Elam a horseshoe-patterned necktie, Van Cleef a jaunty porkpie hat, and Brand a pair of dark-lensed "cheaters." All three actors were at the dawn of 30+ year careers, in Hollywood and abroad, as some of the cinema's most unforgettable mugs. The youngest of the three, Van Cleef died in 1989, followed by Brand in 1992. The oldest, Elam (at 89) is the only one of the gang still living.

Handsomely packaged on this special edition DVD from Dark City Films and Image Entertainment, **KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL** is presented standard frame in 12 chapters. The source print is in acceptable condition, if on the dark side and beset by its fair share of crawling grain. There are a few rough edits (due to frame damage) and several audio dropouts, but in whole the film is admirably rendered and fun to watch. Artfully designed (if somewhat skimpy) cast and crew bios walk the viewer through the lives and *noir* filmographies of the principal cast and director Phil Karlson, and there is a nice gallery of 9 stills and 9 lobby cards. A ragged and fuzzy trailer for Karlson's **5 AGAINST THE HOUSE** (1m 29s) is also included, along with a recent interview (9m 14s) with leading lady Coleen Gray conducted by *film noir* authority Eddie Muller (the author of *DARK CITY: THE LOST WORLD OF FILM NOIR* also provides liner notes). More jovial than informative, Gray (still



Director David L. Hewitt goes ape in the titular role of *THE MIGHTY GORGA*, a film you could make better in your own backyard!

a pip at 80) speaks warmly of her director and leading man John Payne ("I was taken with him... I was enamored") and jokes about her thankless role in **KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL** as "Miss Sparkle Plenty," while cajoling Muller to write a book about the good girls of *film noir*.

THE MIGHTY GORGA/ ONE MILLION AC/DC

1968/1969, *Something Weird*
Video, DD-2.0/+, \$24.99, 84m
21s/64m 43s, DVD-1

By John Charles

Several of *Something Weird's* previous DVD double bills have been pitched at schlock fans (okay, all of them are) but this particular combo is for the hardest of bottom-feeders. David L. Hewitt, the man behind such impoverished spectacles as **THE WIZARD OF MARS** (1964), **GALLERY OF HORRORS** (1966, reviewed VW 59:16), and **JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF TIME** (1967), has been criticized a great deal

over the years, but no one can say that he lacked ambition. Unfortunately, Hewitt's repeated attempts to deliver special effects far beyond his budget and technical resources proved to be his movies' undoing. Nowhere is this more evident than in his final directorial effort to date, **THE MIGHTY GORGA**, which attempts to copy **KING KONG** on a budget that would not have covered Willis O'Brien's rabbit fur bill.

In an attempt to save his financially strapped independent circus, adventurer Mark Remington (*HAWAIIAN EYE's* Anthony Eisley) flies to Africa (represented by San Diego's Jungleland USA and Bronson Caves) hoping to find a new main attraction. Teaming up with animal compound owner April (Meagen Timothy), Mark treks off into the jungle in search of Gorga, a legendary ape god. Hot on their trail is unscrupulous Great White Hunter Dan Morgan (Scott Brady), who believes that Mark and April are actually

after a treasure supposedly buried in the area. When our intrepid adventurers finally reach the plateau, they discover prehistoric vegetation and Gorga (Hewitt), who takes a liking to April when she removes a splinter from his finger (*à la* **SON OF KONG**). Captured by hostile (and distinctly Caucasian) natives, April is inadvertently reunited with her father (Kent Taylor), whose own expedition disappeared six months earlier, but everyone's life is on the line when Morgan appears and the local volcano blows its top.

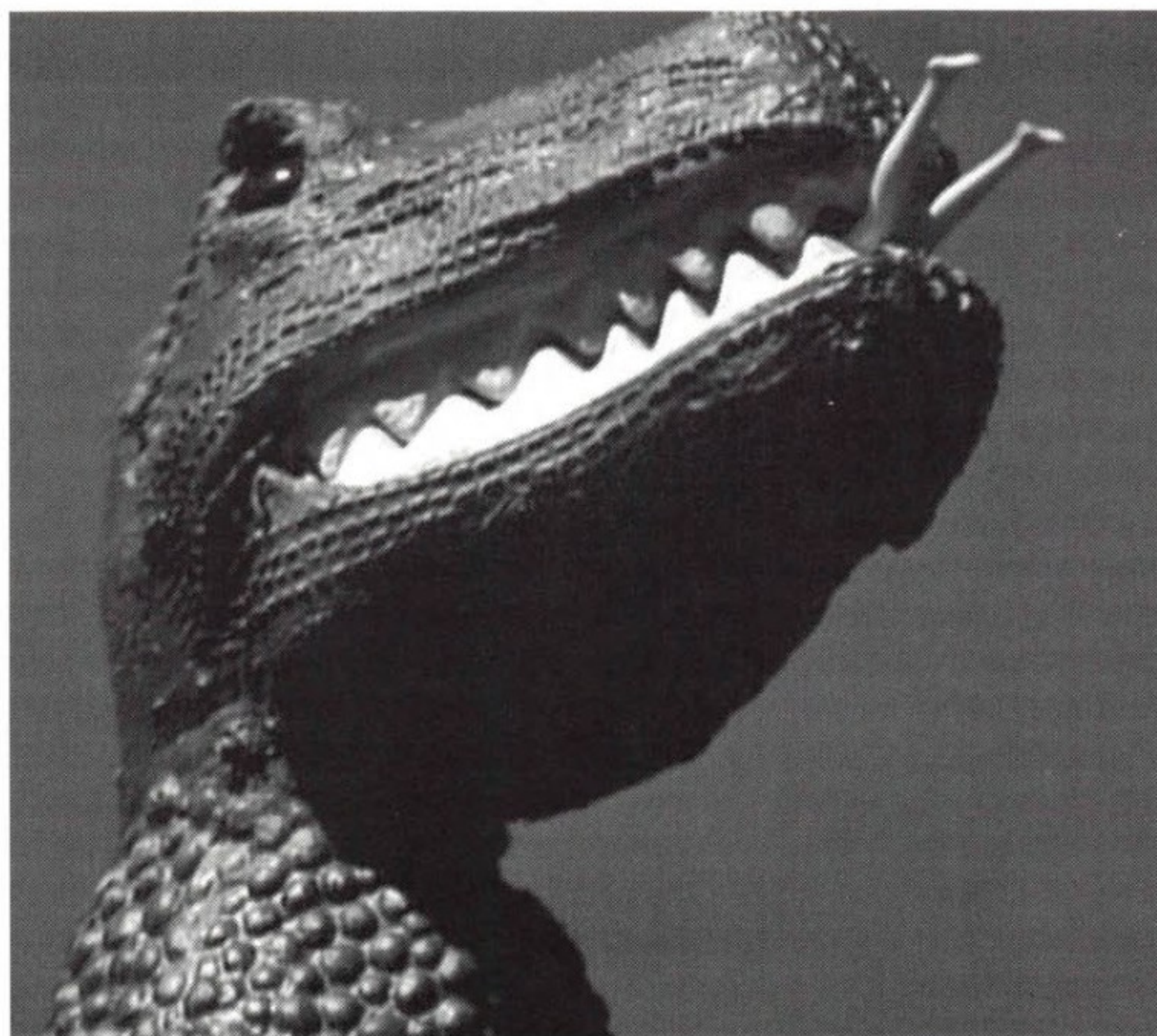
THE MIGHTY GORGA is a study in not knowing (or refusing to recognize) one's limitations. Hewitt could not afford to make an entire gorilla suit (!), so Gorga is only seen from the waist up, and the ape's frozen expression and goofy glass eyes induce laughter with every appearance. The remaining effects (including

a plastic toy dinosaur) are equally ghastly, save for stock footage of Jim Danforth's animated dino from **GOLIATH AND THE DRAGON** (though Hewitt did not unsqueeze the original anamorphic image, causing it to look rather emaciated). Instead of blue screen rear projection, the actors stand in front of a *regular* screen, with the background footage looking incredibly murky and blurry. Most of the performances are reasonably good, considering the plot and idiotic dialogue (when native drums warn that another expedition has left the outpost, April shrugs "It's just jungle gossip") but, even with all of this catnip for schlock fans, most viewers will want to fast forward through several dull, pointless sequences inserted in the opening half to get the picture up to feature length. Al Adamson regulars Gary Kent,

Bruce Kimball (in a dual role as a sadsack clown and the native leader), Greydon Clark and the movie's cinematographer, Gary Graver, also appear.

On the other hand, no amount of fast forwarding can salvage Ed DePriest's **ONE MILLION AC/DC**, an unerotic, unfunny, unbearable non-movie that opens with a card proclaiming that it "meets the requirements set forth in the code of the Adult Film Producers Association." Evidently, all a producer needed to pass this test were naked girls, picture and sound. Written by schlock luminary Ed Wood as "Akdon Telmig" (presumably, an inebriated anagram for "vodka gimlet"), this softcore sham concerns a group of fur-clad throwbacks trapped in their cave by the same rampaging toy dinosaur from **GORGA**! Boredom leads to sex and, amazingly, sex leads to boredom for the audience as the groping is so badly staged, photographed, and edited, the turn-on factor is virtually nil. There is also nothing resembling a narrative, just a handful of incidents strung together in random fashion. Tribe leader Gary Kent kills an upstart who makes the mistake of raping Kent's mate (**DRACULA VS. FRANKENSTEIN**'s Maria Lease), a virgin "sacrifice" occurs, there are various straight and lesbian couplings, and a running joke finds a topless cavegirl unable to escape the clutches of a horny gorilla (the suit is flea-bitten but still better than Gorga). We are also treated to tinted stock footage from **ONE MILLION B.C.** (1940), more forced perspective dino footage, a caveboy chasing his topless girlfriend through what looks like a public park, and "The Orgy," one of the dumbest bacchanals in stroke film history.

The stunningly realistic dino from THE MIGHTY GORGA also shows up in ONE MILLION AC/DC to put the bite on an equally lifelike cavewoman doll.



Those hoping for Woodian magic are warned that there is virtually no dialogue and certainly none of the amusingly eccentric touches for which old Ed was infamous. Upon finishing **THE MIGHTY GORGA**, your first thought might be “**ONE MILLION AC/DC** cannot possibly be worse than that,” but—trust us—it is, and not in an entertaining way.

Something Weird’s master for **THE MIGHTY GORGA** was repeatedly struck from the 35mm negative or a fine-grain 35mm print, but it looks like the same element used for a 1985 episode of *ELVIRA’S MOVIE MACABRE*. The image is soft and the element displays light speckling, but colors are decent and the sound is adequate, considering the mediocre on-set recording. The element used for **ONE MILLION AC/DC** has a fair number of scratches and speckles but the image and sound quality are acceptable. We’re told that the source element had turned completely red, but this has been nicely corrected. There is a nasty glitch at 4:57, but the compression is otherwise competently handled.

SWV has also included the usual multitude of extras, which actually help to make the disc worth considering. Ten very enjoyable trailers (including one for **AC/DC**) offer everything from one-eyed giants (**THE CYCLOPS**) to invisible dinosaurs (**SOUND OF HORROR**) to the Mexican **TOM THUMB**. “Nightmare” (18m 59s) is an 8mm New Jersey home movie from the early ’70s with effects only slightly worse than those in the features! A bespectacled nerd somehow sends himself back in time and encounters crudely animated clay monsters. He accidentally brings one dinosaur back with him to the present and it goes on an brief, forced perspective rampage.

There is no audio, save for a non-stop barrage of familiar library cues. “Prehistoric Daze” (10m 56s) is an excerpt from the 1961 nudie cutie **NOT TONITE, HENRY** that is far easier on the eyes and brain than **AC/DC**. Slovenly burly-Q comic Hank Henry plays a Frenchman who imagines himself back in the stone age. His foxy blonde mate orders him to go out and bag a dino for dinner. After ogling some skinny-dipping lovelies, he encounters his quarry, played by an extra clad in what appears to be one of the upright dino suits from **UNKNOWN ISLAND** (1948)! “Diane the Jungle Girl and Her Gorilla of Love” (7m 30s) is excerpted from Joseph Mawra’s **ALL MEN ARE APES!** (1965, reviewed VW 32:52) and features dancer Steffe DePasse frolicking onstage with her simian partner, Rocky, who comes to her rescue backstage when an ex-boyfriend refuses to take “No” for an answer. Another exploitation ad/radio spot gallery rounds out the extras, and by down-clicking on the Main Menu page, you will find the best reason for acquiring the disc, hidden as an Easter Egg bonus: David Allen’s classic 1960s Volkswagen ad featuring a stop motion King Kong, who climbs down from the Empire State Building to check out the new giant-sized VW 411 sedan.

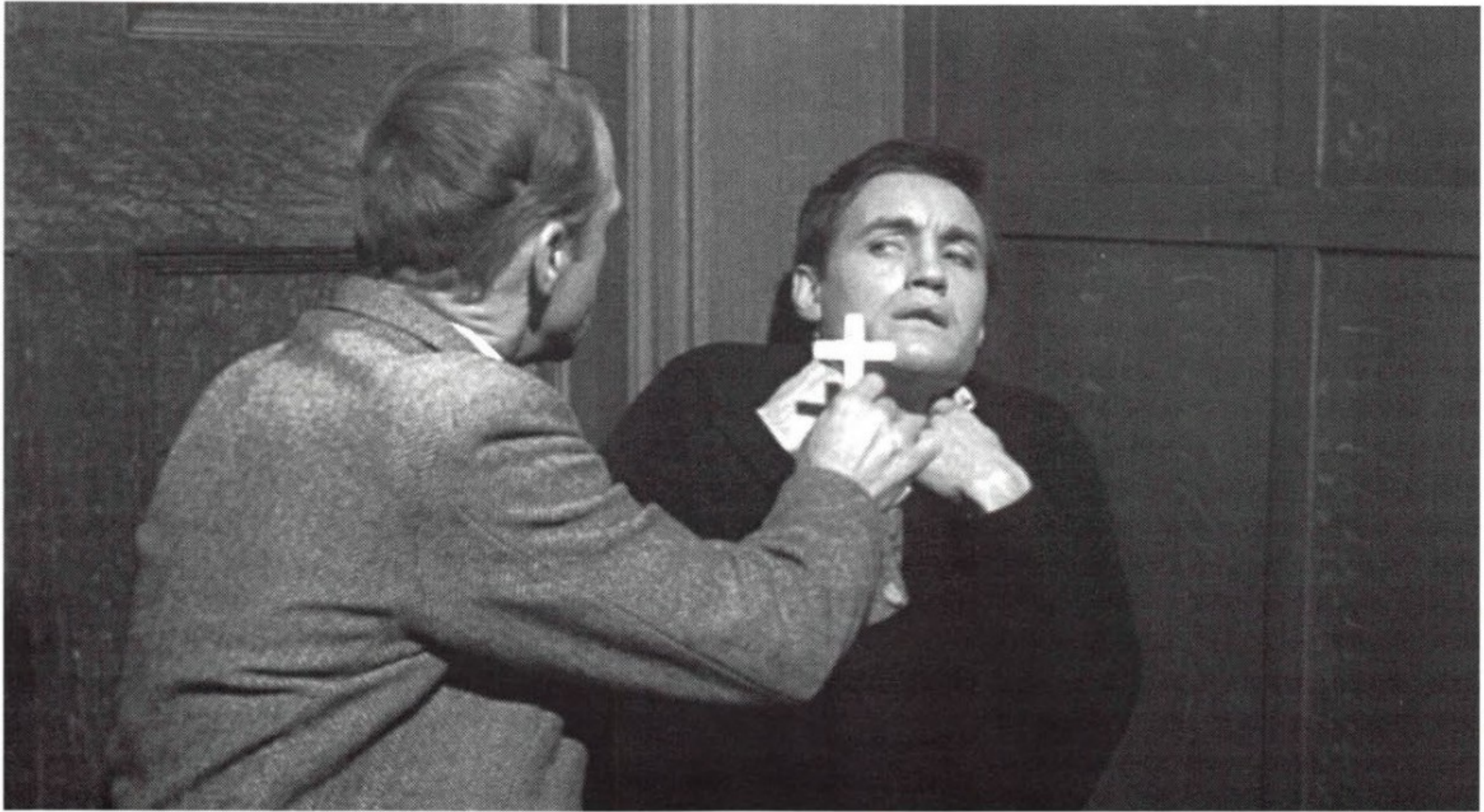
NAKED EVIL / EXORCISM AT MIDNIGHT

1966, Image Entertainment,
DD-2.0/MA/16:9/LB/+, \$24.99,
85m 50s/88m 39s, DVD-1
By Kim Newman

It’s a surprise that **NAKED EVIL** opens with the logo of a major studio (Columbia), since it was—until this release—among the most obscure of British horror films. Bryan

Senn, in essay-length liner notes extracted from his book *DRUMS OF TERROR: VODOO IN THE CINEMA*, refers to it as “nearly impossible” to see, and admits he was only able to write about it because producer Richard Gordon arranged a screening of his own print. Such elusiveness tends to exaggerate reputations: Senn makes a case for the film as unique (which it is) and superior (highly arguable), while the very few contemporary notices it received in any of its incarnations tend to the dismissive and uninformative. Predictably, the rediscovery justifies neither raves nor pans: the film is competently-executed in the manner of a late period British “quota quickie,” with some visual frills courtesy of writer-director Stanley Goulder, performances that vary from competent to inept and at once using an unusual, intriguing *milieu* and failing to make the most of it. The source of the script is “The Obi,” “a play” by Jon Manchip White (screenwriter of **CRACK IN THE WORLD** and **THE CAMP ON BLOOD ISLAND**), though it’s unclear whether the work was originally written for stage, TV or radio.

Set in a provincial English town called “Middlehampton,” **NAKED EVIL** opens with a black junkie terrorized to death by the delivery of an obi bottle, a form of Jamaican hex made with grave-dirt and chicken feathers, which unleashes its full evil when smashed. Then we’re in the crime thriller world of “Spady’s Club,” where Afro-Caribbean English crooks (who seem surprisingly conservative in their dress sense) are indulging in a gang war using voodoo, with an obi tossed through a club door as if it were a hand-grenade. A routine trawl by some routine British movie coppers, led by Inspector Hollis



Reverend Goodman (Olaf Pooley) performs a midnight exorcism in the rarely-seen British voodoo film NAKED EVIL.

(Richard Coleman, Alan-a-Dale in the 1950s ROBIN HOOD TV series), nets terrified physics student Danny (George A. Saunders), who has been delivering the obis made by Amazan (Bari Jonson), gaunt caretaker at a hostel for commonwealth students run by Benson (Basil Dignam), who is cracking-up thanks to evil spells and laburnum-doctored whisky. The bulk of the film is confined to the hostel, a traditional country house setting, with soapy sub-plots about the students and staff, vaguely following the tradition of **NIGHT OF THE EAGLE** [US: **BURN, WITCH, BURN!**, 1962] as supposedly rational academics fray as magic is used against them, winding up with manifestations that follow the usual procedure (sudden harsh winds, smashed windows, attacks of terror). Benson's assistant Alderson (Anthony Ainley—"Reverend Fallowfield" of **THE BLOOD ON SATAN'S CLAW** and one of several incarnations of Dr Who's arch-enemy, The Master) is ambiguously possessed, and

the vicar, Reverend Goodman (Olaf Pooley, writer of **THE CORPSE** aka **CRUCIBLE OF HORROR**) justifies the US TV release title by performing an exorcism (at midnight) that may, or may not, end the trouble.

Aside from Dan Jackson (**THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND**) as a wickedly amused minor gangster and the Reggie Nalder-looking Jonson (**SLAVE GIRLS**), none of the cast make much of an impression. A humorous moment as Alderson and his exceptionally white girlfriend (Suzanne Neve, Mina in a 1968 TV DRACULA) dance badly at a college do is undermined by a group of black background players who are just as awkward. The pool of British black acting talent, usually tapped whenever a show like DANGER MAN did a Caribbean or African-set episode, is lightly tapped here, with Saunders weak in the crucial role and a general attitude that varies from patronizing to fringe-racist. Given that few 1960s films are set

among black Britons (Basil Deardon's **SAPPHIRE** comes to mind), it's disappointing that this film does so little with either the world of Spady's nightclub or the multi-cultural *milieu* of the student hostel, and that after the prologue we see so little of the grey urban blocks of flats where the gangsters find their drugs customers.

Image's DVD is presented in a ratio of approximately 1.78:1, enhanced for 16:9, with thirteen chapter-stops and a clear mono soundtrack. Given how little play the film had, it's unsurprising but welcome that the print is in such terrific shape, with solid shadow that makes the most of cinematography by Geoffrey Faithfull (**CORRIDORS OF BLOOD, VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED**). There's a notable break at about 7m 40s in, but it's an isolated incident.

In the US, Richard Gordon licensed the film to Sam Sherman's Independent-International; to make a TV sale, Sherman took a (slightly cut) print with various

monochrome tints, after the manner of **HORROR OF THE BLOOD MONSTERS**, and topped and tailed the film with color footage shot circa 1980 with Lawrence Tierney as a tough doctor using hypnosis to probe a supposed survivor of the original story, cutting flashbacks with some justification (inspired by the odd approach of **THE BLOOD DRINKERS**) for the various color shades. This disc includes Sherman's version, retitled **EXORCISM AT MIDNIGHT**, in a print which is a little soft in the shot-for-TV material but surprisingly good-looking in the tinted scenes, with 16 chapter stops. Sherman, who is clearly becoming addicted to commentary tracks, provides a 41m 30s audio, explaining his involvement with the film and the additional material, which he wrote without credit and had directed by Steven Jacobson. Sherman laments a missed opportunity: when making his version, he did not know that Goulder had relocated

to America and would have been available to recreate his character and thus tie the new footage into the old far more elegantly than is managed.

Also: two trailers for **NAKED EVIL**, one (oddly, in B&W) pushing an interim version in "Evil-color"; a "promotional and behind-the-scenes photo gallery"; and, in an Easter Egg (highlight the fetish's eyes on the main menu), a trailer for Gordon's **DEVIL DOLL**.

OSSESSIONE

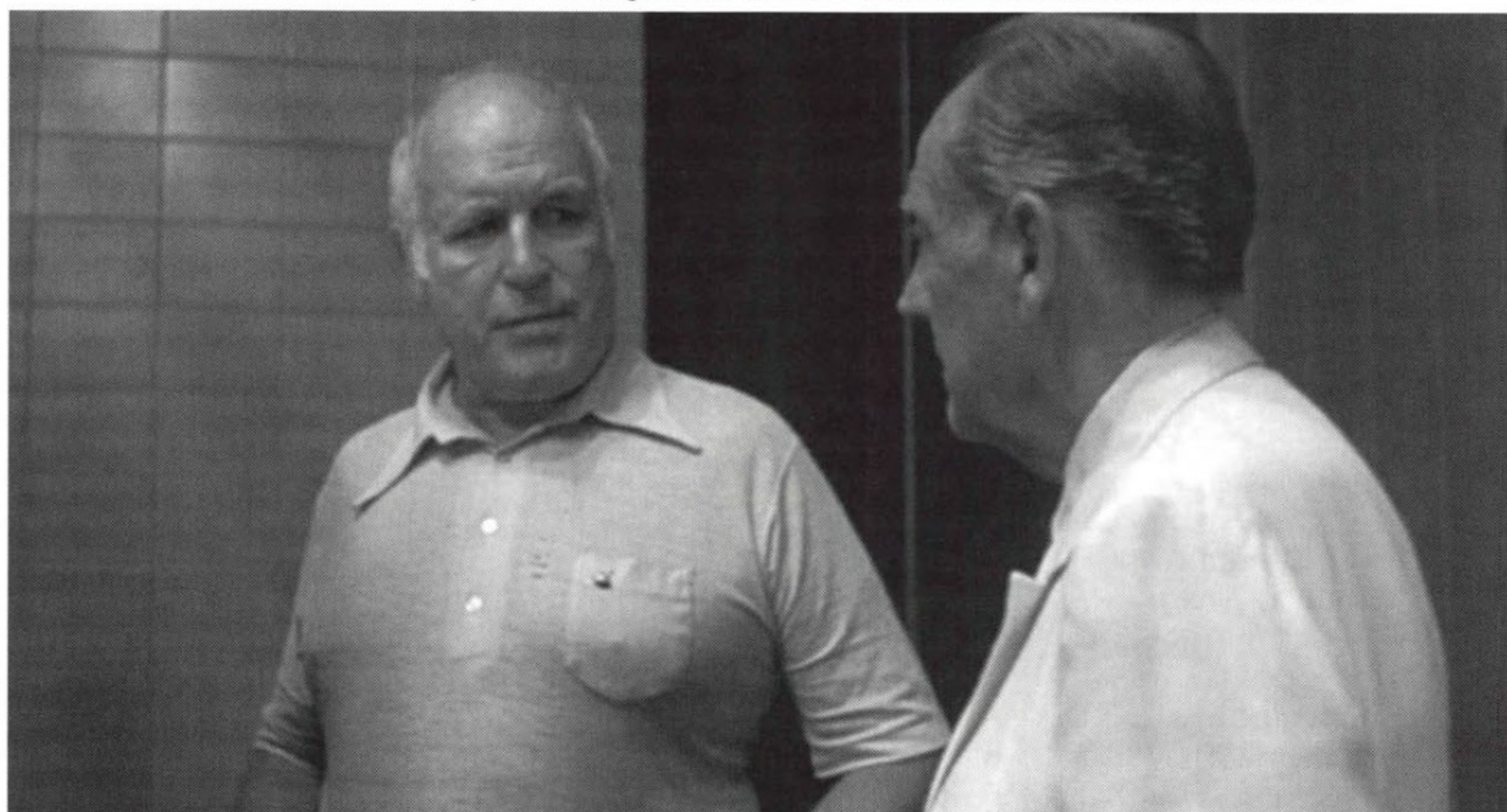
"Obsession"

1942, Image Entertainment, DD-1.0, \$24.99, 134m 1s, DVD-1
By Richard Harland Smith

When the prattling crone played by Clara Calamai in Dario Argento's **DEEP RED** [*Profondo Rosso*, 1975] informs protagonist David Hemmings that she was once an actress ("I had so many good parts"), Argento-philosophers may scoff at the notion of

the then 59-year-old Calamai playing anything other than ditzzy secretaries, prying chambermaids or chuffy dowagers. In fact, a generation earlier, the Tuscany-born actress had starred as the doe-eyed *femme fatale* of Luchino Visconti's **Osessione**, an unauthorized adaptation of James M. Cain's 1932 novel **THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE**. (It was previously adapted as Pierre Chenal's **Le dernier tourant** in 1939; the John Garfield-Lana Turner version was made in 1946 and remade in 1981 with Jack Nicholson and Jessica Lange). Widely if erroneously considered the spark that ignited the Italian neorealist film movement, **Osessione** was not the first choice for Visconti, a Milanese aristocrat who quit Fascist Italy for Paris; when the Communist convert returned home to make his first film, his proposed tale of Sicilian bandits was nixed by Fascist censors, to whom Visconti counter-offered

Lawrence Tierney uses hypnotism to get to the bottom of a feature's worth of recycled footage from NAKED EVIL in EXORCISM AT MIDNIGHT.





Massimo Girotti and Clara Calamai as the doomed lovers in *OSSESSIONE*, Luchino Visconti's unauthorized postwar filming of *THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE*.

this adaptation of the Cain novel, which he sold as a cautionary tale about the wages of extramarital carnality.

Although the screenplay by Visconti, Mario Alicata, Giuseppe de Santis, Antonio Pietrangeli and Gianni Puccini (rumor has it that novelist Alberto Moravia [*THE CONFORMIST*] also had a hand in crafting the script) takes considerable liberties with the particulars of Cain's kinky Depression-era novel, *OsSESSIONe* remains faithful to its central theme of good people twisted by poverty, hypocrisy and hopelessness. Those more familiar with the Hollywood versions by Tay Garnett or Bob Rafelson will find the basic plot familiar: the animal attraction between handsome drifter Gino Costa (Massimo Girotti) and Giovanna Bregana

(Calamai), the young wife of a middle-aged *trattoria* owner, drives the young lovers to murder. Downplaying the courtroom angle of the novel and emphasizing the squalor and inequity of life in Fascist Italy, Visconti and his collaborators isolate the story's essential irony: however she may indulge her long-repressed passions once her husband is dead, Giovanna knows that a footloose life with Gino would render her little better than a whore (a lifestyle from which her unhappy marriage had been an escape) and so she must ultimately return to keeping her late husband's house, running his business and honoring his social context—a doomed enterprise that urges *OsSESSIONe* to its inevitably downbeat (and surprisingly bloody) conclusion.

James M. Cain based *THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE* on the case of a Los Angeles gas station owner murdered by his young wife; the best seller inspired Albert Camus' existential 1942 novel *THE STRANGER* (which Visconti would adapt in 1967, starring Marcello Mastroianni). Visconti was given a translation of the Cain novel by Jean Renoir, whom he served as an assistant and whose gritty, destiny-driven *Toni* (1935) and *La bête humaine* (1938) were also influences for their grim determinism, location photography and use of non-professional actors. Visconti's indebtedness to French naturalism, his employment of a spare, even naive shooting style (borrowed from Fascist propaganda) and his rejection of Hollywood optimism



Charles Southwood takes aim in Mario Bava's comic Western misfire, *ROY COLT & WINCHESTER JACK*.

pointed Italy toward neorealism as a going concern. Following in the wake (if not the success) of *Ossessione* were the similar *Desiderio* (also starring Massimo Girotti, conceived by Giuseppe de Santis and begun by Roberto Rossellini, but finished by Marcello Pagliero), Vittorio de Sica's *I Bambini ci guardano* [US: **THE CHILDREN ARE WATCHING US**, 1943], Rossellini's groundbreaking *Roma Città aperta* [OPEN CITY, 1945], de Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette* [THE BICYCLE THIEF, 1947] and Giuseppe de Santis' *Riso amaro* [BITTER RICE, 1949], which split its focus between social concerns and sex appeal, boosting the careers of Silvana Mangano and Vittorio Gassman, while effectively drawing the curtain on neorealism.

There are two conflicting stories about the fate of *Ossessione* at the time of its premiere in May 1943—both of which begin with Vittorio Mussolini (son of Il Duce and an influential film magazine editor/distributor) protesting

"That's not Italy!" Legend has it that the original negative was confiscated by the Fascists, who destroyed it after editing down a more palatable version running a mere 40m. Film historian (and Rossellini biographer) Tag Gallagher offers the revisionist rebuttal that neither the Fascists (who fell from power shortly after the film's general release) nor the Third Reich attempted to suppress the film, but that it displeased war-time audiences who craved escapist fare. (The Nazis were, however, responsible for the murder of co-star Elio Marcuzzo in 1945.) Whatever the cause, *Ossessione* remains less seen, sixty years later, than other entries in the film genre it supposedly initiated. Original prints reportedly ran 140m; the version offered on this DVD from Image Entertainment runs about 6m shy of that length but represents what is likely the only extant version. The source print is in variable condition, beset by scratches, damaged frames and sound

drops, but is overall watchable and the standard presentation is satisfying enough. The disc has 14 chapters. There are no extras, but the English subtitles are removable.

ROY COLT & WINCHESTER JACK

1970, Image Entertainment, DD-2.0/16:9/LB/+, \$24.99, 85m 24s, DVD-1

By Kim Newman

Even if nothing seems likely to take away the status of **DR GOLDFOOT AND THE GIRL BOMBS** as Mario Bava's worst film, general availability of this comedy Western might give rise to some debates on the question. Though his Viking pictures are essentially cowboy films in iron helmets and a streak of black wit runs through Bava's fantasies from **DIABOLIK** to **LISA AND THE DEVIL**, the great man doesn't seem to have had an especial interest in the Western as a genre, or a knack for flat-out

comic material. Some routines here, such as the fearsome gun-fighter with a squeaky twitch or the scheming villain suffering diarrhea behind a rock during a shoot-out, are low comedy at its lowest, without even the marginal charm of the similarly bowel-obsessed Trinity series. Subtler scenes play a little better, like a posse-recruiting speech which is actually designed to scare off possible volunteers with tales of the murderous fearsomeness of their quarry. The pull-back where Bava reveals a suddenly empty saloon shows that he relies on the camera rather than performance to get effects, whether terror or laughter. Sadly, even this is marred by "funny" music and a weak punchline about the deafness of the sole, apparently brave man who has heard the Sheriff out.

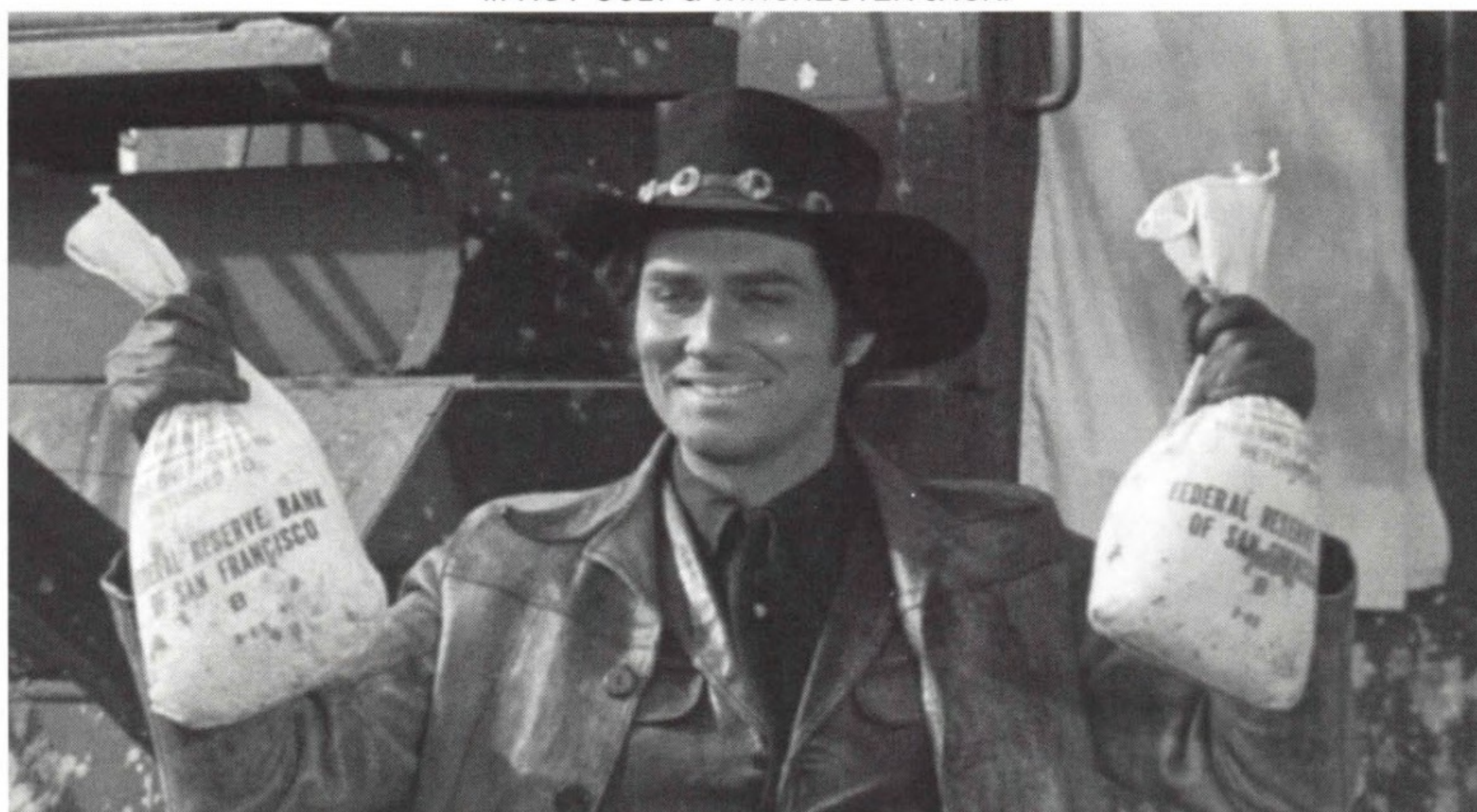
In his generous liner notes, VW's own Tim Lucas cites many references to the world of Sergio Leone, from the casting of a

Leone lookalike (Giorgio Gargiullo) as the cripple whose treasure map kicks off the plot to a final three-way confrontation over a buried fortune. The title suggests also an attempt to evoke the then-mammoth success of **BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID** as a pair of on-again, off-again brawling buddies, Roy Colt (**RETURN OF THE FLY**'s Brett Halsey) and Winchester Jack (Charles Southwood), work both sides of the law, feud over a woman (**BLUE-BEARD**'s Marilù Tolo as Indian maid Manila) and band together against a third party, the intestinally-troubled Reverend (**5 DOLLS FOR AN AUGUST MOON**'s Teodoro Corrà)—who, in a peculiar aside, is a Russian who claims Rasputin as an acquaintance. The set-up is that Roy and Jack haven't been making much money with their outlaw band, perhaps because they prefer having comic fistfights with each other (as their compadres stand

around the camp) to pulling off robberies, so Roy leaves and takes a job on the right side of a Sheriff's badge in "Karton City." Both men wind up with an interest in a search for buried gold, though they basically horn-in on the evil dynamite-happy Reverend's quest to dig up the dust. Alliances are made and betrayed, and it winds up with the buddies brawling again—their chance at the gold goes up in smoke when an argument over ownership of a black hat leads to a deadly insult ("*ladri di capelli!*") and a resumption of their comedy fistfight.

Admirers of Bava's work will have to look hard for features of interest: some interiors show typical Bava lighting, with areas of red or blue shade within the same frame, and there's a tiny grotesque touch (perhaps derived from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Gold Bug") with a skull whose empty eye socket has to be peered through in order to

Brett Halsey as Roy Colt, a rogue who charms his way behind a sheriff's badge, in ROY COLT & WINCHESTER JACK.



find the treasure. With an easy listening organ-and-strings-heavy music score by Piero ("Mah-ná Mah-ná") Umiliani and comic business about overuse of dynamite, this feels like a **BUTCH CASSIDY** rip-off made by people who have had the original described to them but didn't actually see it. Burt Kennedy and James Garner were making a series of Westerns in the late 1960s (**SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SHERIFF**, etc) that very successfully melded the gunplay and thrills of the traditional oater with a light, charming-but-cynical touch. This would like to manage that, but Halsey and Southwood are lumpen presences, incapable of engaging anyone, and the comic support cast mostly rely on pulled faces and jittery panic. Tolo, as a whore without a heart of gold, is the most interesting character, if only because Bava delays until the very end the question of whether she really is as mercenary as she seems, or will finally melt and cozy up to one of the leads. First-time viewers should avoid the chapter titles, which give away how this plot-strand will turn out.

Image's DVD transfer measures approximately 1.80:1, enhanced for 16:9, with a burned-in 2001 copyright date, a rich-sounding Italian dialogue track and optional English subtitles. The print retains its Act break card ("*Fine Primo Tempo*"). For a film obscure even on its home territory, the print quality is fine—there's light speckling throughout and the colors tend to the muddy (probably a fault of the original processing), but nothing too distracting. The extras are familiar to anyone who owns the rest of Image's "Mario Bava Collection": Lucas' bio of the director and a clutch of trailers (not including

one for this title). An insert booklet contains Lucas' notes on this specific film, concluding "The amount of gold you find may depend on how deeply you dig."

SUNSET BOULEVARD

1950, Paramount Home Entertainment, DD-1.0/MA/ST/+, \$24.99, 110m 10s, DVD-1

By Bill Cooke

As director Billy Wilder sat dejected on the steps outside an Evanston, Illinois preview of **SUNSET BOULEVARD**, an unknown woman spotted him and asked, "Have you ever seen shit like this in your life?" Wilder, ever the sardonic wit, replied "Never!"

Originally, this most famous of self-referential Hollywood satires (onscreen title: **SUNSET BLVD.**) opened at the county morgue as William Holden's character, the doomed Joe Gillis, was adorned with a toe tag and wheeled into cold storage along with the other sheeted cadavers. After the lights were extinguished and the attendants left the room, the corpses began to speak to one another, welcoming Joe and inquiring about the circumstances surrounding his demise. The surreal episode was meant to be morbidly amusing, only the Evanston crowd started to laugh uproariously and, for the duration of the film, never fully recovered. Wilder later described that evening as one of the darkest moments of his life.

He also must have noticed how history was bizarrely repeating itself. Five years earlier, Wilder's **THE LOST WEEKEND** suffered a similarly disastrous test screening. Audience members openly guffawed at the opening shot of a bottle hanging outside the window of alcoholic anti-hero Don Birnam's

apartment, and proceeded to misinterpret the rest of the despairing *noir* drama as a comedy. Wilder and the studio were seriously considering shelving the project (or accepting the liquor industry's offer to buy the negative so they could destroy it!) until composer Miklós Rózsa determined that people were giggling because of a totally inappropriate temp score made up of cartoonish, "Gershwin-esque" city music. Once Rózsa supplied his own brooding and dramatic score, nobody laughed at Don Birnam again.

With Franz Waxman's masterful score already in place, **SUNSET BOULEVARD**'s poor reception could not be blamed on music. The director's solution was to create a brand new opening in which police and reporters congregate poolside at a Beverly Hills mansion to gawk at Gillis' floating corpse. Even with the main character's *narration from the beyond* retained, the new opening was not nearly as patently bizarre as the original and proved a perfect introduction to the film's darkly comic tone.

The original screenplay by Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett (from their story "A Can of Beans") remains one of cinema's most sublime and deliciously dialogued works. It tells the story of Joe Gillis (William Holden), a destitute Hollywood screenwriter who, in an attempt to elude repo men, hides his car inside the garage of what he assumes is an abandoned mansion on Sunset Boulevard—only it turns out to be inhabited by former silent screen siren Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson) and her German soldier-like butler Max (Eric Von Stroheim). When Norma learns of Joe's profession, she



William Holden, caught in the clammy clutches of silent screen goddess Gloria Swanson, in the Billy Wilder classic SUNSET BOULEVARD.

immediately seeks his help polishing her own script—a gargantuan telling of *SALOMÉ*—that the aging actress plans as her big comeback (excuse me, “return”) vehicle. The ludicrousness of a 50 year-old woman portraying a teenager is not lost on Joe, but he accepts the flamboyant ex-star’s proposition anyway; and, to keep a roof over his head, he even relents to being her live-in gigolo. While Norma obsessively undergoes massage therapy and skin treatments to get in shape for a production that will never be, Joe wanders off at night to collaborate on a script with Betty Schaefer, an ambitious young reader at Paramount who’s engaged to Joe’s best friend Artie (Jack Webb). Before long the two fall in love—Joe sees in Betty his salvation from the suffocating

gothic madness of Norma’s world—but Norma discovers the affair and is soon harassing Betty over the phone. Furious, Joe invites Betty to the mansion where he divulges his seedy existence as a kept man and breaks off their relationship. Fed up, Joe packs his things and is storming out the door when Norma’s madness overtakes her (“Nobody leaves a star—that’s what makes one a star!”) and she shoots him in the back. Joe falls dead into the swimming pool. The next day, as the reporters set up their lights and cameras to cover the next big celebrity crime, Norma, now totally insane, descends her staircase to a waiting public, believing that she’s on a movie set performing *SALOMÉ* for DeMille and all “those wonderful people out there... in the dark!”

The film’s uneasy mixture of movie-biz satire, macabre humor, morbidity and sincere tragedy must have been a difficult brew for audiences to swallow in 1950 (while nominated for a “Best Picture” Oscar, it lost—not surprisingly—to the more conservative **ALL ABOUT EVE**). Wilder and Brackett draw us in to their weird scenario by beginning the story several times in the first act and switching genres each time. The opening establishes the film as a crime melodrama; early scenes of Joe on the run have the feeling of *film noir* and, once the character abandons his car and enters the Desmond mansion, the underlying genre “vibe” switches to horror. Our first view of Norma is unsettling as it is mysterious—her dark glasses shine like black

spider's eyes through a web-like window shade. The inside of the house is hardly less intimidating: Max speaks in a sepulchral tone ("If you need any help with the coffin, call me"), a dead monkey lies in front of a fireplace, vast ornamented rooms are heavy with dust and darkness; and there's that eerie organ music that we assume is part of the underscore until Norma comments it ("the wind gets in that blasted pipe organ... I ought to have it taken out!"). There's an amusing *homage* to **DRACULA** as Norma watches Joe read and curls her fingers into a **NOSFERATU**-like claw. And later, Joe describes Norma's friends to us ("dim figures you may remember from the silent days") as "Waxworks." In this Hollywood haunted house, there are no ghosts, only the living dead.

Every aspect of the production is top drawer, from the incredible cast (has better ever been assembled?) to John F. Seitz's cinematography, which is always moody but also has moments of scintillating beauty. To highlight Norma's dementia, Seitz bathes her in light sources that have some tie to the movie world (a flickering beam of light from a projector bulb, a spotlight from the studio rafters, the reporters' flashbulbs and lights in the final scene). The score by Franz Waxman is underappreciated and one of the great examples of the *leitmotif* method applied to a human drama as opposed to a gargantuan action spectacle. Each character gets his or her own theme: Norma's exotic motif, often played by sultry saxophone, is set against a tipsy-sounding tango rhythm

(when it is played *fortissimo* at the end, the tango theme becomes Norma's own demented "Dance of the Seven Veils"); Max is given a single-note wind-up soldier's march; and Betty is given a lovely romantic theme that Waxman actually based on a Paramount newsreel march because the character was supposed to have grown up around the lot. Joe's theme undergoes the most variations, starting out as a meandering jazz tune played by solo piano when the character is a suffering writer, but eventually becoming lushly orchestrated as he starts to live a life of luxury. The score's major non-character motif is the chase music that opens the film and appears periodically whenever characters are obsessively driving themselves (such as in Norma's "makeover" montage) or running from something. As an exasperated Joe packs his bags and Norma implores him to stay, we get a feeling that the film is coming to an end because the chase motif is there, twisting and uncoiling like a snake about to strike.

Paramount is not known for feature-laden special editions, but the company happily made an exception with **SUNSET BLVD.** The transfer is absolutely stunning, coming very close to the transcendental qualities of Warner's **CITIZEN KANE** DVD, though purists looking for a close approximation to the original theatrical experience may balk at the virtually grain-free image.

Nevertheless, it's a "face-lift" that would make Norma Desmond envious. A lot of care went into the design of the menus, a digital recreation of Norma Desmond's private screening room. As "battered"

scenes from the movie unspool, the sound of a projector clicks away, and menu selections are accompanied by the sound of a celluloid tail smacking against a metallic take-up reel. Extras include an audio commentary by Ed Sikov, author of **ON SUNSET BOULEVARD: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF BILLY WILDER**. Sikov, who literally wrote the book on the subject, provides plenty of production history and anecdotes, but still allows gaps of silence. Perhaps Sikov didn't want to tell it all, for he also appears on the disc's 26m making-of documentary along with Nancy Olsen, the only surviving cast member—and still looking quite beautiful. Film critic Andrew Sarris appears sporadically but has little to offer ("Gloria Swanson, I think, gave a fantastic performance..."). The documentary is supplemented with two separately accessible featurettes: "Edith Head: The Paramount Years," and "The Music of **SUNSET BOULEVARD**." The "Music" segment features on-camera interviews with Franz's son John, composer Elmer Bernstein and conductor John Mauceri, who should know the score well since he arranged and recorded a suite of the film's music for his album **HOLLYWOOD NIGHTMARES** (Philips 442 425-2).

Proceeding through Paramount's menus we find still galleries and a "locations" map, but the most exciting supplement of all is a patchwork presentation of the infamous "Morgue Prologue." Even though a completely edited and sound-mixed print could not be found, Paramount did uncover some outtakes and has presented them here, along with a script draft dated Dec. 21, 1948. Wilder, with characteristic humor, lists the

actors that he hoped to get: "Dan" Gillis (sic) was to be played by Montgomery Clift, "a new face" was required for Betty Schaefer, and the cast was to be rounded out by "some smaller parts: movie people, cops and corpses." A revised script (3/19/49) is also included, in which we can see Wilder attempting to tone down the macabre humor, even before the Evanston debacle. In the earlier draft, a child cadaver describes his drowning: "It's only bad when you try not to swallow. If you just open your mouth and let it in, it doesn't hurt a bit." In the revised script, the line was rewritten to say: "I bet Pinky Evans I could stay under water longer than two minutes, and I did, too."

Occasional camera icons take you to existing silent footage from the morgue sequence. You get to see an ambulance pulling up to the morgue, a toe tag tied to Gillis and his body wheeled into the room with the other corpses. Unfortunately, the footage that we *really* want to see—the cadavers in conversation—is not to be found.

SUNSET BOULEVARD completists should know that yet another piece to the puzzle exists on the simultaneously released re-recording of the score on CD (Varèse Sarabande C302 066 316 2). As a bonus track, producer Robert Townson and conductor Joel McNeely offer the 9m "Prelude and Conversing Corpses," an atmospheric and ethereal cue unlike any other found in the score. Amidst plaintive melodies for the various dead people, fragments of Joe Gillis' motif can be heard slowly converging until the flashback begins and Waxman fully states the theme in its more familiar and jaunty piano guise.



Don't call him "Dogula"! He's ZOLTAN... HOUND OF DRACULA.

ZOLTAN... HOUND OF DRACULA

aka **DRACULA'S DOG**

1977, Anchor Bay Entertainment,
DD-2.0/MA/16:9/LB/+, \$19.98,
87m 14s, DVD-1

By **Bill Cooke**

When a military exercise disturbs a tomb on the outskirts of a Romanian village, soldiers investigate the crumbling ruin only to discover it contains a family strain of Draculas. That night, an earth tremor knocks one of the coffins out of its slot, and a lone sentry opens the crumbling lid to reveal a shroud with a wooden stake sticking out of it. Oblivious to the lessons of folklore and film, the soldier rather nonchalantly withdraws the stake. Suddenly, there is movement beneath the shroud. Amazingly, the sentry *doesn't* run away. Then the shroud erupts from the force of something powerful leaping out of the coffin. Is it a fanged count

in evening attire? A pale, bosomy vampiress? An oversized, beady-eyed bat? Nope. Would you believe... an undead *dog*? Swiftly, the pestilent pooch is at its victim's throat, sinking its elongated canines into a coursing jugular and lapping the sweet blood while its eyes glow like soulless headlamps.

So begins **ZOLTAN... HOUND OF DRACULA** which, unfortunately, never comes close to matching this inspired opening in any of its remaining minutes. After pausing adoringly for some credits, Zoltan breaks into the coffin of Veidt Schmidt (cadaverous Reggie Nalder) and revives his former master by yanking on the stake with his jaws. Veidt isn't a pure vampire—he's a "fractional lamia," a slave-class being that doesn't crave blood and can function in the daytime in order to find victims for his master. Apparently not interested in reviving any of the interred



The problem with having an undead dog, Reggie Nalder discovers, is that you can't teach them to go in a box.

Draculas, Veidt telepathically informs Zoltan that they must find their "new" master, and they beat a hasty exit just as the tomb starts to cave in. Arriving on the scene the next day is Inspector Branco (José Ferrer), wise to the ways of vampires, who informs us that Veidt cannot survive without a master and is most likely *en route* to Los Angeles where the last of the Dracula line, Michael Drake, resides.

Sure enough, the undead stooge and his four-legged fiend arrive in California via cargo ship and quickly locate Drake (**GRAVE OF THE VAMPIRE**'s Michael Pataki) who's living the American Suburban dream with his pert wife and wholesome kids (progeny considered, Michael *isn't* the last of the Draculas, after all). Oblivious to the creepy man in the hearse watching their every move, the Drakes pack up their RV and head for the lake for a

little R&R (cue "smiling faces" travel montage), bringing along their faithful German shepherds Samson and Annie. By night, Veidt and Zoltan seek their would-be master's neck (he must be converted to vampirism), but are repeatedly foiled by those pesky pets. After Zoltan puts the bite on the German Shepherds, plus a fisherman's mutt, Veidt commands his pack of hell hounds to terrorize the family he wishes to serve and (so there can be at least one gory death scene) feast on a hapless hiker. Luckily, Inspector Branco arrives in the nick of time and finds Drake, despite being a psychologist, absurdly easy to convince of his ancestry ("I'm going to sue all those people who've been making those Dracula pictures without my permission!"). A strange old man appearing out of nowhere babbling about vampires would be enough to send most

people fleeing to the nearest police station; instead, Drake packs up his family and sends them back home so he can be alone with Branco ("Baby, I trust him... now you trust me!"). The unlikely vampire slayers retire to a fisherman's cabin ("Not exactly the Hilton in Bucharest, but it will have to do") and spend the evening acting out **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DOGS** as Zoltan and his canine cohorts thrust paws through windows (puppet appendages courtesy of Stan Winston) and attempt to gnaw their way in.

Albert Band (director of the interesting **I BURY THE LIVING**) may have fashioned the ultimate horror film for cats, but for the rest of us, **ZOLTAN** isn't much to howl about. Released at a time when vampires were out of vogue (even Hammer had given up), the film is an admirable attempt to put a new spin on the old Dracula

warhorse. (He's had brides, a son, a daughter... why not a dog?) However, director Band (father of exploitation filmmaker Charles and composer Richard) and writer Frank Perilli are not up to the task of fully developing their audacious premise. Among the many questions left unanswered: Why isn't Zoltan destroyed when the dock inspectors open his casket in broad daylight? And, if he's a true vampire, shouldn't he be able to shape-shift?

Vampirism invaded the animal kingdom before and after **ZOLTAN**: comic book scribe Steve Gerber wrote about a bovine bloodsucker in 1975 for the inspired HOWARD THE DUCK tale "Hell Cow," and in 1979, Deborah and James Howe published the popular children's book BUNNICULA. Gerber and the Howes, of course, saw the comic potential of a vampiric animal and produced wonderfully creative and parodic stories. The straight-faced Band and Parelli, on the other hand, don't see the inherent humor in their concept and try for a full-blooded horror film. Unfortunately, the action sequences are not particularly tense or scary (unless you find stuntmen and trained dogs rolling around on the ground to be unnerving), and the film inevitably careens into the realm of *unintentional* comedy, marked by the occasional hysterical image such as a vampire puppy pulling itself out of the ground in slow motion.


The film's main draw is Reggie Nalder (see career overview in VW 17:26), two years shy of being promoted to "Master" as the frightening Mr. Barlow in Tobe Hooper's superior TV miniseries SALEM'S LOT (1979). Unfortunately, save for a flashback

in which Veidt and his dog are enslaved by Dracula, Band doesn't have Nalder do much of anything except stand around and stare intently while mentally intoning repetitious lines like "Soon, Zoltan!" and "Now, Zoltan!" As the film wears on, it becomes painfully obvious that the makers have no ambitions to add any complications to the plot or complexities to the characters. We're informed early on that Veidt cannot survive without a master, yet he seems to function perfectly well for the film's duration. Certainly, there would have been a lot more tension if we saw Veidt gradually breaking down from his ordeal, like a drug addict denied his fix. Also, we expect a lot more from Michael Drake. As "the last of the Dracula line," shouldn't he feel some lure to the dark forces that have come to claim him? Shouldn't his heritage at least emerge in some way to help him in the climactic struggle?

Because Michael Pataki essays a dual role, he has the dubious honor of being miscast twice in the same film. Bedecked in full Lugosi regalia as Count Igor Dracula for the unconvincing period flashbacks, he looks more like somebody's drunk uncle in a Halloween costume than a formidable vampire. The macho Pataki (who directed both **MANSION OF THE DOOMED** and **CINDERELLA** for the Bands in 1977) was always more suited to hot-headed street-wise roles than sensitive or intellectual ones, so he's even *less* credible as Drake, a purported psychologist and family man. José Ferrer, as the Van Helsing-like Branco, is clearly mouthing his lines in anticipation of a paycheck; he has none of the passion or physical energy that Peter Cushing would have given the part. And,

frustratingly, Band pads Ferrer's screen time with one "captivating" scene after another of the saturnine actor driving around to the beat of an annoyingly hip and happy score. The only other cast members worth mentioning are the dogs, who show a great deal more enthusiasm for the project than their human co-stars. Too bad their hard work is undermined by terrible sound effects: a short series of dog barks is endlessly looped and overlapped with a wild assortment of animal growls and screams, including a lion and a chimpanzee!

ZOLTAN... HOUND OF DRACULA may be a dog, but Anchor Bay Entertainment doesn't treat it like one. The company has resurrected superior source elements from the vaults and delivered a gorgeous transfer that is 16:9-enhanced and letterboxed to a ratio of approximately 1.67:1. Throughout, the image exhibits mesmerizing detail in the backgrounds and color that is, aside from the slightly pink skin tones, rich without oversaturation. Grain and compression artifacts are rarely a problem, even during nighttime scenes. Unfortunately, the film's cheap origins are more apparent through the mono soundtrack that alternates between too soft (dialogue) and too loud (barks that are nerve-rackingly loud). The sound field is occasionally opened up to a subtle two-channel mix to give the flashback sequences more reverberation, and an alternate French-language track is offered.

Extras are confined to a long 3m theatrical trailer that sells the film as camp ("Now there's a nice doggie... But before you pet it... take a good look!") and an insert card that offers poster art with the film's alternate title, **DRACULA'S DOG**. 



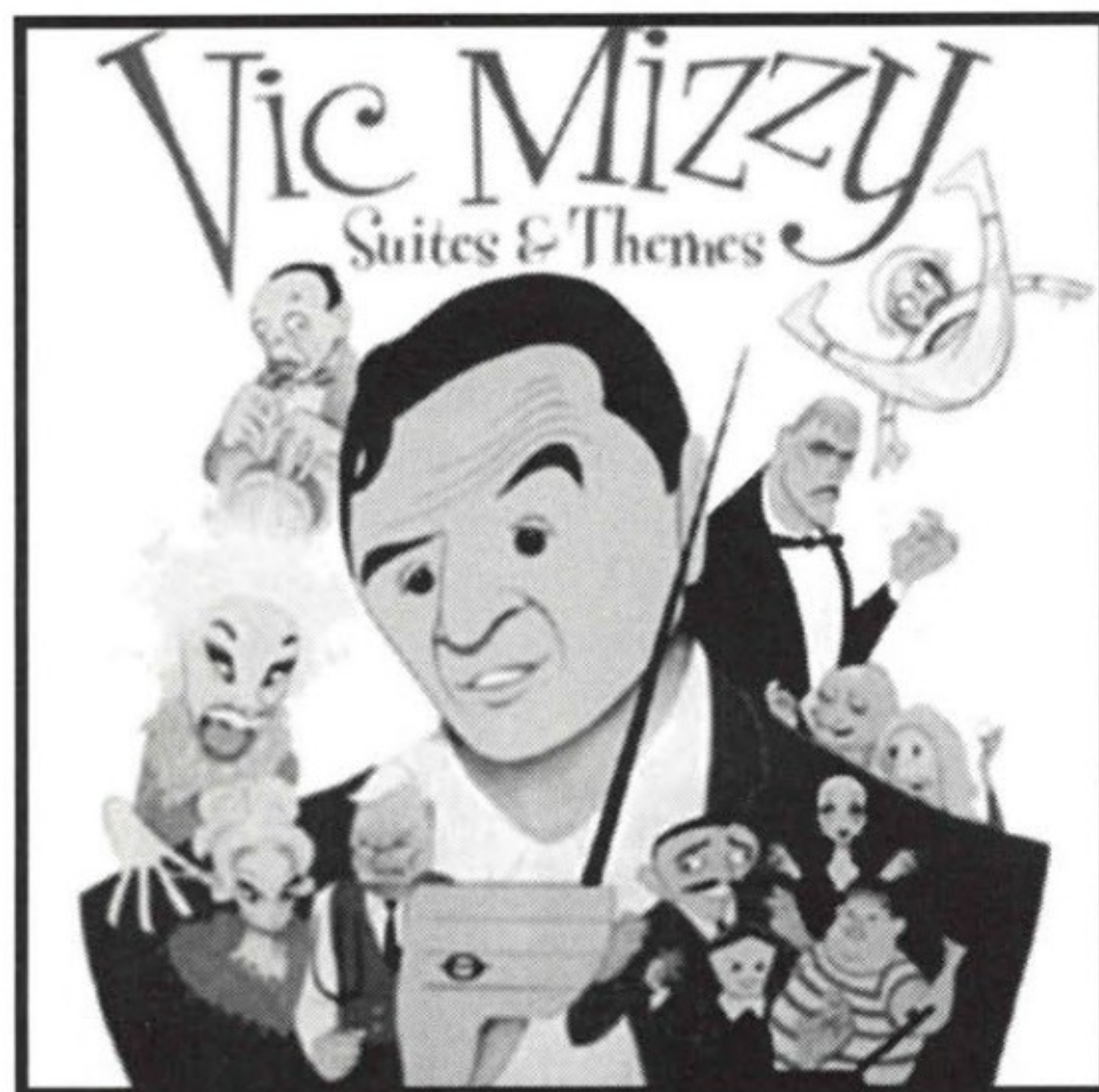
By Douglas E. Winter

Gettin' Mizzy

You know his music: frolicking harpsichords, funereal organs, snapping fingers, braying brass. Defiantly playful and, like the subjects of one of his famous theme songs, creepy and kooky, mysterious and spooky. His scores are as unique today as when we heard them first, in the musical moshpit known as the 1960s. Now you need to know his name: Vic Mizzy.

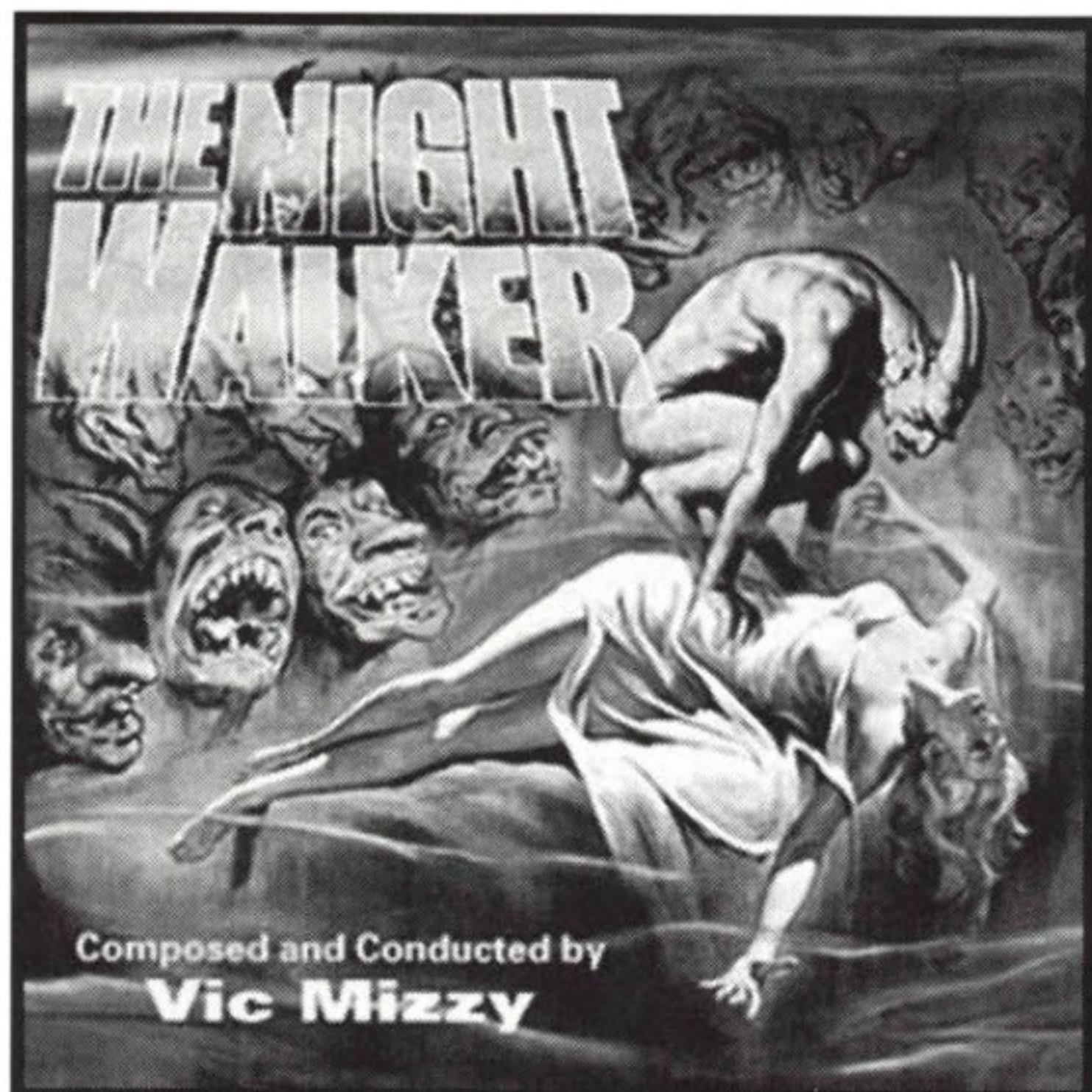
Born in Brooklyn in 1922, the clown prince of film composers has been ill-represented on compact disc until recently, with a remarkable celebration of his 80th birthday, courtesy of Taylor White's Percepto Records. Dr. Mizzy first made his mark as a songwriter, becoming the youngest member of ASCAP at age 17. Although his songs were featured in a few 1940s films, including Abbott & Costello's **IN SOCIETY** (1944), his scoring talents weren't fully appreciated until his work on **THE RICHARD BOONE SHOW** (1963). Then came the magic moment: Mizzy agreed to compose for free—if he received the series contract—the title song, lyrics included, for a Filmways pilot called **THE ADDAMS FAMILY**. Next came **GREEN ACRES** and his first feature score, for William Castle's **THE NIGHT WALKER** (1964). Suddenly Mizzy was the composer of choice for a series of quirky American films of the 1960s and '70s, and his self-styled "spastic" arrangements are legendary.

Last year saw Percepto's promotional release of **VIC MIZZY—SUITES & THEMES** (Percepto-003,



\$19.95, 36 tracks, 77m 17s), a 1,000-copy limited edition retrospective of Mizzy's career in film and TV, which featured cues from 13 feature films and 15 television projects, ranging from the most-wanted scores of **THE GHOST AND MR. CHICKEN** and **THE RELUCTANT ASTRONAUT** to the cowpoke spoofery of **THE SHAKIEST GUN IN THE WEST** and the groovy surf-pop of **DON'T MAKE WAVES** to the Theremin-powered main title for **THE 13TH GATE** and the moody **TERROR ON THE 40TH FLOOR**—and, of course, his famous theme songs (with original vocals from the likes of Eddie Albert, Eva Gabor, and Phyllis Diller). Remastered from original studio tapes, the disc is accompanied by a 24-page booklet with liner notes by Daniel Schweiger and, as we've come to expect from Percepto releases, a fine collection of stills, posters, and lobby cards.

THE NIGHT WALKER (Percepto-009, \$19.95, 22 tracks, 49m 40s) premieres the complete score for William Castle's first film for Universal, a Robert Bloch adaptation of Elizabeth Kata's short story "Witches' Friday." (Bloch's screenplay was, in turn, "novelized" by Sidney Stuart—a one-off pseudonym of Michael Avallone—for an Award paperback published in 1964.) One of Mizzy's darker and triumphant scores, **THE NIGHT WALKER** features the inventive orchestrations that would become a trademark of his work—most notably, a main title powered by bass guitar and prepared piano. It's impossible to believe that this music was written in only four days, but that's what we're told in another impressive 20-page booklet—this time with liner notes by Castle historian Dick Thompson.



Mizzy scored three more films for Castle, including two 1967 Sid Caesar comedies paired by Percepto on **THE SPIRIT IS WILLING/ THE BUSY BODY** (Percepto-012, \$19.95, 41 tracks, 74m 53s). Both scores share a groovy vibe, jazzy riffs swinging into orchestral passages or pop excursions with a delightful disregard for expectation. The original main title for **THE SPIRIT IS WILLING** featured vocals by Mizzy, but the master no longer exists, and the CD includes only the orchestral version. An alternate version, without sound effects, of **THE BUSY BODY**'s main title is included and the liner notes are provided by Mizzy himself, whose wry humor is infectious.

More diverse Mizzy music is found on the pairing of scores from Russell Rouse's final film **THE CAPER OF THE GOLDEN BULLS** ("Carnival of Thieves") (1966) and the 1967 silent movie homage **THE PERILS OF PAULINE** (Percepto-010, \$19.95, 41 tracks, 73m 31s). **CAPER**, a heist thriller starring Stephen Boyd and Yvette Mimieux, showcases Mizzy gone Latino, with Samba-crazed cues that might have brought him an Academy Award had the film been called **FRIDA**. **THE PERILS OF PAULINE** actually features two Mizzy scores—one written and recorded for an NBC-TV television pilot, and the second for the feature that resulted. Starring Pat Boone and "Dodge Rebellion" girl Pamela Austin, **PERILS** finds Mizzy channeling the spirits of silent film keyboard tunesmiths while also delivering a jaunty yet romantic orchestral score. This CD, with liner notes by Mizzy, has been issued in a limited edition of 500 copies.

What's next in Percepto's ongoing tribute to Le Miz? Keep watching these pages—and

Percepto's website (percepto.com)—but for now, I'll offer only two words: Don Knotts.

Sex, Love, and Monsters

Notable new music accompanies Evans Chan's **THE MAP OF SEX AND LOVE**—Hong Kong's first full-digital feature, which will be released here on DVD/VHS by Water Bearer Films. This celebrated production offers an elegant and moving score by "new classicist" Milos Raickovich (Riverdrive RDP003, \$14.00, 15 tracks, 44m 1s). Performed on piano and cello, its melancholy atmospheres are supplemented by cues ranging from art-rock to Portuguese fado to a Cantonese aria. The CD can be purchased by e-mail c/o moyung@felixmarketing.com.hk; for further information about **THE MAP OF SEX AND LOVE**, visit evanschan.com.

Raickovich's ethereal music is far distant from the '80s metalmania that powers **CARNIVORE** (Dark Star Records 0002, \$14.98, 10 tracks 35m 43s)—a compilation of power and gothic metal bands including L.A. Guns, Nitro, Holland, and Slave Driver. This indie soundtrack's ambition puts the major labels to shame, with a canny use of the enhanced CD format to include the complete instrumental score (by Doug Loftstrom) in 19 MP3 tracks, as well as film and music video previews. For more information, bang your head at DarkStarRecords.com.

Review materials should be sent c/o One Eyed Dog, PO Box 27305, Washington DC 20038. The Audio Watchdog is on-line at OnEyeDog@aol.com.



BIBLIO WATCHDOG

SHERLOCK HOLMES ON SCREEN: THE COMPLETE FILM AND TV HISTORY

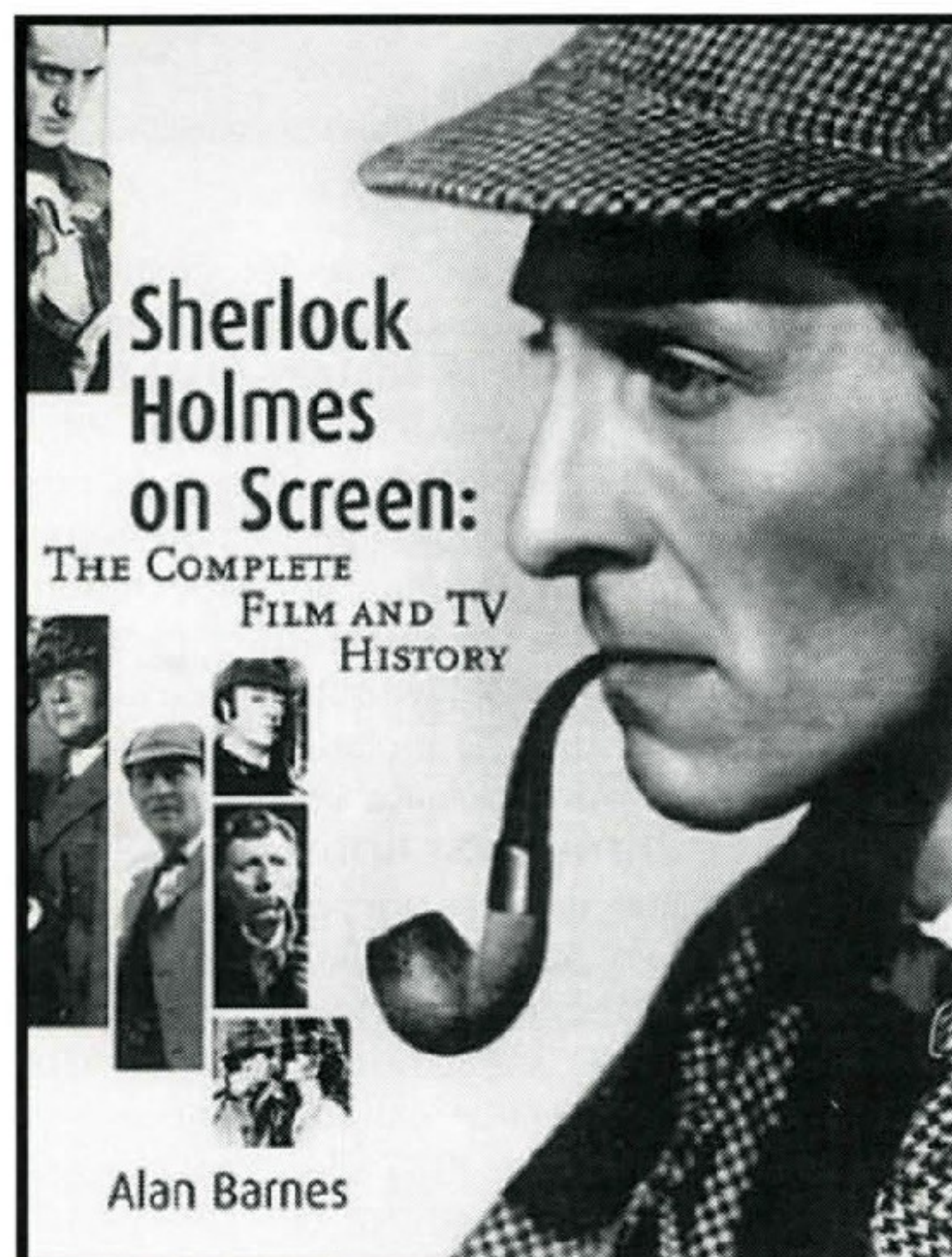
By Alan Barnes
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240 pp., £17.95 (softcover).

**Reviewed by
Anthony Ambrogio**

This volume's 126 alphabetized listings do indeed make up the complete history of Sherlock Holmes in the movies and on television. Alan Barnes does a fine job of relating the detective's screen exploits, providing production histories for each title, and assessing the actors who have played Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's most famous protagonist.

They're all here: the earliest, unauthorized Holmes silents (whose French and Danish producers never secured rights to the character—nor to Arsène Lupin and Raffles, whom they frequently pitted against the detective); the well-known series starring the most famous filmic and video Holmeses (Ellie Norwood, Clive Brook, Arthur Wontner, Basil Rathbone, Peter Cushing, Jeremy Brett); films featuring famous actors as Sherlock (John Barrymore, Christopher Lee [thrice]; Roger Moore, Charlton Heston, etc.); and all the other large- and small-screen Holmes adaptations, parodies, and pastiches (Sherlock-speak for a Holmes story not written by Doyle).

For some readers, Barnes may be *too* thorough. His meticulous entries for some of the many British teleseries will hold only academic interest for American readers, since most of these never played on US TV, though PBS did broadcast the high-profile Brett shows and *MURDER ROOMS*, in



which Holmes prototype Dr. Joseph Bell and his protégé, Doyle himself, become an ur-Holmes and Watson. (Other programs are even *more* obscure: a 1979 US/Polish series, *SHERLOCK HOLMES AND DR. WATSON*, with Geoffrey Whitehead and Donald Pickering as the respective leads "has never aired in Britain, and has only been screened in the US on the smallest of stations—on the Oregon local network, for example, early in 1982.") Similarly, because so many of the silent Sherlocks no longer exist (Barnes notes that a 1993 "US survey reveals that less than ten per cent of films made in 1910s have survived"), there's a perhaps inescapable dullness to Barnes's entries on those pictures

because he cannot fairly assess them and must rely on contemporary, undetailed reviews. But the book wouldn't be a complete history without these, and its A-Z structure lets readers easily pick and choose which entries to peruse.

Reading the book from first page to last presents the history in non-linear form; anyone who prefers a sense of historical progression can read the entries in the order supplied by the Chronology at the back of the book. This is a very useful tool, as the book's sole deficiency is its lack of cross-referencing. For example, you won't find the Rathbone **HOUND** under "H" because its onscreen title is **SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES**. But who would know? A "**HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES** (1939): See **SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S...**" entry would have made the book a good deal more user-friendly.

Those unfamiliar with the 56 stories and four novels that comprise the Holmes canon may feel at a slight disadvantage because Barnes does not summarize the plots of movies and teleplays that faithfully adapt their sources. (For pastiches, he does provide a tripartite summary—"The Mystery," "The Investigation," and "The Solution.") If a picture is based on "A Scandal in Bohemia" or "The Speckled Band," he expects the reader to know about Irene Adler (*"the woman"*) or villainous Dr. Roylott and his venomous snake. That's probably a safe bet, since anyone interested in this book will probably have at least a passing knowledge of the literature, but unfamiliarity with the text is actually a minor problem. Throughout, Barnes maintains a respectful iconoclasm: "... although [this book] assumes a very general acquaintance with the 60 adventures comprising 'the canon,'... it's not been written for Doyle purists.... I note, for example, where a TV or film adaptation has diverted from Doyle, but I do so without prejudice: I want to know why, what effect it has, and whether the change is interesting or amusing or entertaining in its own right."

Therefore, Barnes's observations are, as often as not, non-canonical. For instance, this summation of Universal's **THE SCARLET CLAW** (1946): "Dourness, sobriety and lack of invention... have led **THE SCARLET CLAW** to acquire a reputation among Holmes fans as the best of Universal's Basil Rathbone pictures, but it's quite atypical of the series—an exception, yes, but hardly exceptional." He also makes this interesting comment on the role of Dr. Watson onscreen: "Those revisionists who complain that [Nigel] Bruce's Watson mars [the 1939 **HOUND**—not to mention the 13

Rathbone pictures that followed it... on the grounds that Doyle didn't write Watson as an older, better-natured, funnier foil to Holmes, might ponder whether or not Bruce's Watson didn't actually rehabilitate the doctor on screen. Watson had, after all, been more or less written out of the first 20 years of Sherlock Holmes films.... Before Bruce, Watson was considered dispensable; after Bruce, it would be a near unthinkable heresy to show Holmes without him."

The book is replete with information that should be new to most readers. For example, Basil Rathbone's last filmic turn as the detective was *not* in Universal's **DRESSED TO KILL** (1946) but in a 1953 episode of the TV series **SUSPENSE**, "The Adventure of the Black Baronet"; future director John Ford *may* have played Watson to his brother's Sherlock Holmes in the 1914 Francis Ford-directed two-reeler, **A STUDY IN SCARLET**; and Christopher Lee could have been the first Holmes to meet Jack the Ripper if his (*dubbed!*) turn in **Sherlock Holmes und das Halsbad des Todes** [US: **SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE DEADLY NECKLACE**, 1963] had been better received: Barnes shows how **A STUDY IN TERROR** (1965), "in a roundabout sort of way," was the promised sequel to that film.

Barnes's writing tends to be both accessible and accurate. That said, there are perhaps a few instances of inaccessibility—at least for American readers, who may be forgiven for not understanding Barnes's allusion to "a 'disgusted of Tunbridge Wells'-type Colonel" (p. 199). The only inaccuracy we detected was Britisher Barnes's reference to "Senator Joseph McCarthy's *House* un-American Activities Committee" (p. 201, our italics). Though McCarthy's name is retroactively applied to the general blacklisting that started in 1947, it was Congressman J. Parnell Thomas's HUAC committee which investigated Hollywood and destroyed the careers of people like **THE SPIDER WOMAN** star Gale Sondergaard.

Barnes's opinions, however, remain steadfastly on the mark—but perhaps we feel that way because they correspond so often to our own. On **THE SPIDER WOMAN** (1943): "a total joy, its only real fault being its oddly perfunctory closing minute." On **MURDER BY DECREE** (1978): "it's not the perfect Holmes picture, nor is it the consummate Ripper flick; it's a thriller with a conscience, and that makes it more rare and more necessary than either of these."

See what we mean? It doesn't take a master detective to realize this book's worth. It's elementary.



THE LETTERBOX

BUILDING A HOUSE ON DVD

I read a letter in VW [94.79] regarding our DVD edition of **DR. TERROR'S HOUSE OF HORRORS** in Italy, so I decided to explain some points. If you want to publish them, it might be interesting for your readers.

The very last segment of the film is missing because it was missing from the reversal BFI 35mm print we used for our new digital transfer. Unfortunately, when we bought the rights to the film, we were promised access to a brand new digital master. It didn't happen that way, as always, but we got a 4/3 DigiBetacam letterboxed at 1.85:1. We used this to insert the final and main titles ending, as it was more complete, made a few years ago for Deutsch cable, which explains the reason for the Dutch titles; otherwise, it's almost the original UK main and end sequences.

Then we decided to have the only materials available transported to Italy, so the BFI archival 35mm reversal print was sent to Italy, and we made a new digital 16:9 enhanced transfer at 2.35:1. Unfortunately, the reversal print didn't have the main and end titles, so we decided to restore the original 35mm Italian main titles sequence. It was also missing the last segment that Mark Middleman pointed out in his letter. So we decided to include that piece (still missing a few seconds) using the 1.85:1 German master. Sadly, the positive 35mm prints we found of the



Italian version were all missing the ending of the picture.

We couldn't afford to restore the trailer, too expensive; that's the reason why it's so scratchy. The subtitles are not optional because this was required of us by contract. Every time we sign a contract for a film never before released on DVD, we are forced to put unremovable subtitles on the original soundtrack.

The Italian dialogue was indeed changed to exploit the fact that Christopher Lee was very famous here, and everywhere, as Dracula. The distributors were clearly looking for any link available with those films, which explains the added line "Here comes Dracula..."

As **DR. TERROR** was the first DVD made for us by a new post productions service, it has some playback problems on some players, which we have solved for our subsequent releases. If you experience problems, try this: let the disc start, then stop it, then access the set-up of the player, select the English audio option, then start again. Usually, this works!

Michele De Angelis
Alan Young Pictures
Rome, Italy

The cast of CAPTAIN SCARLET encourage you to send your letters to VIDEO WATCHDOG... no strings attached!

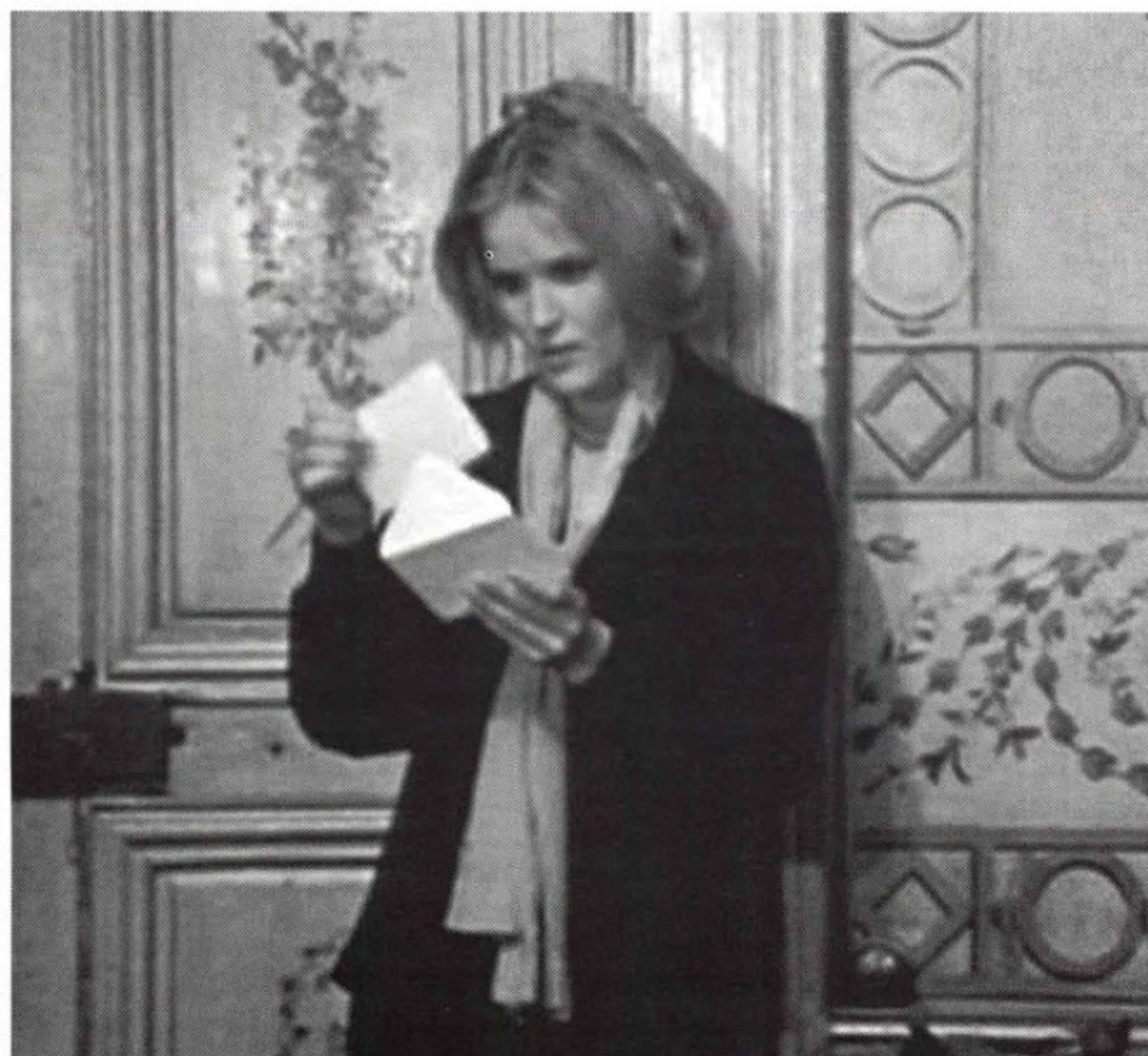
LIVE RATS ROASTING ON AN OPEN FIRE

In Shane M. Dallmann's review of Something Weird's **CARNIVAL OF BLOOD/CURSE OF THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN** DVD [VW 92:48], he writes that many sources claim that **HUNCHBACK OF THE MORGUE** was not given a US theatrical release. As I recall, Mr. Dallmann also said something about a trailer on the DVD stating that **HUNCHBACK OF THE MORGUE** was released in the US in 1973 by Cinemation.

This reminded me of a newspaper ad I found in an unabridged dictionary, which I inherited from one of my grandmothers. She had saved a newspaper article ("Pamper the Christmas Posies") and the movie ads were on the other side of the page. And yes, **HUNCHBACK OF THE MORGUE** was one of these ads. The date was December 21, 1973, and

HUNCHBACK was playing at three area drive-ins (open for part or all of the week, in spite of the weather). There is no distributor information in the **HUNCHBACK** ad as such, but the co-features were **I DRINK YOUR BLOOD** and **I EAT YOUR SKIN**, both of which have "JERRY GROSS Presents" above their respective titles. ("3 GREAT BLOOD HORRORS TO RIP OUT YOUR GUTS!" appears in a box at the top of the ad. The copy for **HUNCHBACK** ("HIT 1") reads "BEWARE THE HUNCHBACK! A freak of nature whose crimes go beyond your wildest terrors!" Also, after going to the library to do some further research in microfilmed copies of THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR, I found that, while **HUNCHBACK** opened on Wednesday, December 19, there was no ad for the film until Dec. 21! Finally, **I EAT YOUR SKIN** ("HIT 3") played on Fri. and Sat. only, for whatever it's worth.

Lisbeth Humel is astonished to learn how much was spent on plain yogurt during the making of THE BEAST.



Sorry to go on at such length about this, but this ad is pretty cool-looking—and the triple feature mentioned above is only part of it. The overall ad is for all of the Indianapolis-area United Artists theaters, and some of the other display ads within the larger ad ("UNITED ARTISTS HOLIDAY ATTRACTIONS EXCLUSIVELY AT THESE THEATRES") were **BORN BLACK**, **INVASION OF THE BEE GIRLS**, **THE SACRED KNIVES OF VENGEANCE** and **WILD WHEELS**. Surrounding the whole thing is a border of various Christmas-related items: candy canes on the sides, ornaments on the top, and wrapped presents on the bottom. Oh, how I wish that I had been old enough to go to the drive-in back then!

Mike MacCollum
e-mail

ARTIE AND COMMERCE

Re: the Umlands' review of **SEANCE ON A WET AFTERNOON** [VW 94:59], the American theatrical release in 1964 has a footnote of interest for trivia buffs. It was distributed in the US by Artie Shaw.

Yes, the Artie Shaw who gained fame as a sensationally good clarinetist and big-band leader during the 1940s. He was a lover of art (also a painter; his works are still exhibited), beautiful women (he married eight times, including Evelyn Keyes, Lana Turner and Ava Gardner), and movies. It was the love of movies that prompted him to try his hand at film distribution with **SEANCE**. It was a success, but he only released two other features (one German, one Italian) before moving on to whatever his next passion may have been.

Quite frankly, I have no idea where he found the energy for film distribution!

Larry Thomas
Cincinnati OH

C'MON GET SLAPPY

Thank you for running Richard Harland Smith's review of **THE IMAGE** [VW 91:43]. This is truly a classic film that deserves the attention. Smith's insight and history on the film was much appreciated by this fan. I didn't even know it was on DVD and immediately bought my copy when I finished the article. I compared my video copy to the new transfer and noticed that the garden scene and the dressing room scene were longer on the DVD. I guess they thought it was too hot for American audiences when it was released to tape back in the late 1970s.

One odd note: Mary Mendum appears under the moniker of "Robyn Millan" in an episode of **THE PARTRIDGE FAMILY** television show as Dora, the tone-deaf singer (Episode 26, "Dora, Dora, Dora"). The Seventies sure were odd times!

Paul W. Henning
Belleville MI

BIZARRE DISEMBODIED VOICE EXPLAINED

Having just received the NTSC region 0 DVD of Giuliana Gamba's 1987 erotic drama **BIZARRE** (aka *Profumo*) on the Mei Ah Laser Disc Co. label (DVD-093), I'd thought I'd write with some Watchdogian bits about the disc.

First off, it runs 91m—6m shorter than the old Prism pre-record, which ran 97m. The time discrepancy isn't due to a PAL transfer, however, as the DVD is literally missing 6m of footage, including two or three entire scenes (none of the erotic footage is missing). The "Florence Guerin in..." credit that opens the film is gone, as are 2 scenes: after Guerin checks into a hotel, the DVD cuts to her walking into

the hotel's bar, but in the Prism video, she visits her father in a nursing home prior to the bar sequence. In the second scene, Guerin suggests to her new lover Robert Egon Spechtenhauser that he would make a beautiful woman, and in the next scene Egon's made up like a woman having his pictures taken in a photo booth. In the Prism VHS, there's a lengthy scene between the aforementioned one, in which Guerin lovingly makes-up Egon to look like a woman. There are a few other scenes that are shorter by only a few frames.

Despite being cut (although of nothing consequential) and having permanent burnt-in Chinese subtitles, the DVD blows away the Prism video with its quality, color, and 1.85 framing. The letterboxing really adds to the film. In one scene, Guerin's husband talks to her while standing on the left side of the screen, but on the video, he's cropped entirely offscreen! The color is a revelation, as night scenes are bathed in cool blue lighting, colors are bright and colorful, and fleshtones seem right, which all contribute a sense of style to a film that was previously lacking this, or so I thought, based on my viewing of the VHS.

Dan Pydynkowski
Danvers MA

DON'T BE ANG LEE

In issue 88's review of **GOSFORD PARK**, you make reference to the "Ang Lee film **THE REMAINS OF THE DAY**." Of course, Ang Lee directed **SENSE AND SENSIBILITY**, not **THE REMAINS OF THE DAY**, which was a Merchant-Ivory production directed by James Ivory.

Joshua Zyber
Jamaica Plain MA 

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